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ELECTRO PETE, THE MAN OF FIRE; or, THE WHARF RATS OF LOCUST POINT.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "JACK SIMONS, DETECTIVE," "THE MAN SPIDER," "THE MAN OF STEEL," ETC., ETC., ETC.



THE DETECTIVE RECEIVED A SHOCK AS FROM AN ELECTRIC BATTERY WHICH HURLED HIM BACK AND PROSTRATE ON THE BRIDGE.

Electro Pete, THE MAN OF FIRE:

OR,

The Wharf Rats of Locust Point.

A Baltimore Detective Tale.

BY ANTHONY P. MORRIS,

AUTHOR OF "THE MASKED MYSTERY," "HANK HOUND," "THE MAN SPIDER," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE ROBBERY.

"AM dis yere de detective aguncy?"

"It is."

"An' is you de boss man?"

"I am one of them."

"I hes a note fo' you."

It was in the month of November, with weather unusually balmy for the season.

Late in the afternoon of a certain day, there was presented at the well-known agency of the Baltimore detective bureau on Lexington street in the City of Monuments, the face of a negro, black as a coal.

From him came the inquiries which open this narrative.

As he uttered the last words, he advanced, extending a missive to Mark Daniels, the junior member of the private firm, West & Co.

The famous sleuth opened and read the following lines:

"GENTLEMEN:—Please send a representative to the Mansion House at once. Important."

"All right, Pomp," he said to the negro, who therewith departed after a profound bow that indicated an immense reverence for the mysterious profession.

Shortly after this, Daniels was at the Mansion House, in the clerk's room, just back of the office, engaged in a low-toned conversation with the proprietor.

"I have a case for you," remarked the gentleman, when he had carefully closed the door.

"Ah!"

"Something very mysterious is happening here. We have tried to fathom it ourselves, without drawing too much attention to our efforts. But it seems at last necessary to call in the services of such a person as yourself."

"What is the matter?"

"Just this: There have been several very singular robberies committed in this hotel of late. At first they were of a trifling character. Now the matter has assumed a serious phase."

"Please state exactly what has transpired."

Mark Daniels was an old hand at his business—a man of about forty-five years, with hair of mingled black and gray, keen, gray eyes, and possessed of a fine physique.

He leaned back in his seat and waited to hear the other's explanation of what was to appear, indeed, a singular feature of hotel robbery.

"The last theft I mention was one of an article or articles valued at several thousand dollars—the property of a drummer for a large jewelry house in New York, who was here exhibiting samples to jewelry houses in this city."

"What has been lost?"

"Diamonds."

"Have you any suspicions?"

"There is where we are puzzled. The circumstance of the loss is such that it seems impossible to suspect any one; yet they are gone, and they could not walk off of themselves."

Daniels gave his chair a nearer hitch.

"I'll tell you how it is," the proprietor resumed immediately. "Mr. Dimble—that is the drummer I speak of—informs me that his case of most precious diamonds was under his pillow when he retired. There is no communication between his and any other room. When he awoke in the morning, the gems were gone. His door was just as it had been when he went to bed, bolted and locked securely on the inside. It would seem almost out of the question that any one could have entered the room. He was inclined to raise Ned-and-Cain about it; but we persuaded him that if he hoped to recover his valuables the surest way would be to remain very quiet and summon a detective."

"Quite correct on your part. Where is this Mr. Dimble?"

"I believe he is at this moment in his room."

"Let us go up to him. Besides, I would like to make a little examination of the room."

"Very well, come on."

They ascended to the apartment occupied by Mr. Dimble.

The drummer was there.

He was a man well on in years; at the minute of their entrance he was pacing to and fro in a half suppressed excitement, and turned quickly upon them.

"This gentleman is the detective," the hotel proprietor introduced. "Mr. Daniels, Mr. Dimble."

Dimble advanced nervously to the detective and grasped him by one arm.

"Tell me," he began, at once; "do you think I shall ever get back the beautiful stones? Is there any hope? If they are lost then I am ruined; for I can never pay to the firm their value, and I will be held to a strict account for them. Tell me—"

"Wait a moment, please," Daniels interrupted. "The first thing to be done is for you to calm yourself. Be seated."

Dimble obeyed; but he uttered a despairing groan as he sunk into the chair which the proprietor shoved forward.

"Now, then, be kind enough to state just what you have lost and give me any other information you can."

Dimble started up. He crossed and returned with a sachel in hand.

"In here," he said, evidently controlling his tones to calmness with a great effort, while his hands shook—"here I always carry my precious samples. But among them was a small belt of velvet, in which I had a string of pocketed diamonds worth, without the mounting, over ten thousand dollars. This I was in the habit of keeping under my pillow at night—even at times sleeping with my hand under the pillow and grasping the fortune of gems. Last night they were placed as usual; but I had not my hand on them. This morning they were gone, sir—gone!" and as he uttered the last, he groaned again.

"First, can you give me a description of the stones?" inquired Daniels, in a business way.

"Ah, more than that! I can show you one of the stones."

He drew forth his pocket-book. From this he extracted a small but magnificent specimen, admirably cut, and handed it to the detective for examination.

"Is this one?"

"That is one of the stones that belonged in the little belt I have lost. I had it out to show at Canfield's yesterday."

"You say it is one like those lost. You mean in size?"

"More than that!" exclaimed Dimble, brightening a little. "It is precisely like the rest in cutting; for the stones were originally intended for a coronet ordered by an actress who insisted that they be cut in a precisely similar fashion—a little unusual. At the very date of their completion the actress died. She had in her possession, at the time of her death, one of the stones for approval, and had deposited its value upon receipt of it, expressing the wish that the others be hurried. As I say, at their completion she died suddenly and without having paid any more on them. The gems were left on the hands of my employers, and were given to me to dispose of in parts or in whole."

"The cutting of all is alike?" Daniels observed, thoughtfully.

"Precisely."

"Your room was locked and bolted when you retired? It was locked and bolted when you arose and found the gems to be missing?"

"Yes."

The detective took a scrutinizing turn around the room.

The apartment was one of those that open over the great area-way of the hotel, which is like an immense flue of considerable width.

Glancing out, he realized that no one could have ascended by a ladder or other means—for it was in the fourth story, this room of Dimble's—and there was nothing in the shape of a water-spout or lightning-rod to have facilitated the ascent of so much as a monkey.

Truly a puzzling case that the detective found himself in at the moment; for he was at a loss for the slightest theory.

While he made the unsatisfactory examinations Dimble watched him anxiously.

Watched him too did the proprietor, for he felt the reputation of his establishment at stake.

As both saw the disappointed look gathering in Daniels's face they felt discouraged. And Dimble uttered again that dismal groan of a man who feels that he is in a predicament which is to result in his ruin.

"Ten thousand dollars!" he moaned, wringing his hands. "Ah, I shall be sent to jail. They may even accuse me of knowing something about the disappearance of the diamonds, when they hear the seeming impossible facts."

"You should have deposited your valuables in the safe of the office," suggested the proprietor.

What further might have passed was interrupted by the hurried appearance, just then, of one of the chambermaids.

"I have been looking for you everywhere, sir," she said to her employer pantingly.

"What's the matter?"

"That's something I'll never tell you. But there's something ails the lady in room No. —."

"What like?"

"She jerked the bell a few minutes ago, and when the waiter went up, he found her looking as if she'd seen a ghost, and she demanded that you be brought to her room immediately. Why, she is a sight, with her hair all hanging and—"

He strode away to investigate this new mystery in room No. —.

The girl followed curiously.

In a few minutes, and while Dimble and the detective were talking further about the robbery, the proprietor came back and said, addressing Daniels:

"I wish you would step this way, sir. I think there is something else going on that calls for your attention."

Daniels followed him out, first saying to Dimble:

"For the present, if you wish me to do anything, with any hopes of success, remain perfectly quiet in regard to your loss."

"Quiet! quiet!" chattered the dismayed drummer, like one with a chill. "I am to remain quiet when I have lost my employers' property—ten thousand dollars! How can I remain quiet?"

And when alone, he began a repetition of the restless striding backward and forward, in which state of excitement he had been found by the others.

While Dimble was bewailing his loss, a singular scene was transpiring with the occupant of the room No. —.

The proprietor led the detective forward and introduced him to a beautiful woman—a girl, rather, for she was unmarried, and it was doubtful whether she had passed her twentieth birthday.

Her eyes were as black as coals, and unlike the usual cold glance of black eyes, her large orbs sparkled like precious gems upon the men before her.

Her face was indeed of an arresting loveliness, without a mar in its delicate contours; and her figure, of good height, was perceptibly faultless in the loose robes which she wore at the moment.

Streaming down over her shoulders was an opulence of hair black as midnight and glossy as silk waves.

But in face and eyes there was an expression at the time of intense startlement.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER MYSTERY AT THE MANSION HOUSE.

INTRODUCING Mark Daniels, the hotel proprietor said:

"Miss St. Dyer, this gentleman is a detective. I would like you to state to him what you have told me."

Daniels was gazing steadily at the beautiful girl. He saw in her one of remarkable force of character.

"I have been very much frightened, sir."

"Ah?" inquiringly.

"Be seated and let me tell you all about it. Excuse my appearance; I had not thought to have any visitors in my room. But that which has transpired had at last so worked upon me that, in a sudden impulse, I sent for this gentleman to tell him of something extraordinary that has happened within this room during the last twenty-four hours. Of all the experiences of my life, nothing can compare with what I endured here, in the darkness of midnight, last night."

"Proceed, please. I would like to hear what it was."

"Do you believe in the supernatural?" she asked.

"Well, no."

"Neither did I until last night. But something has occurred to make me believe that either I have seen some horrible spirit of another world—else I must have had one of the most marvelous dreams that have ever come to human slumber."

Her listeners remained quiet.

"I have already astonished the gentleman here," Oriole St. Dyer continued, indicating the proprietor, "by informing him that there has been a prowler in my room for several nights past, after I have retired. Upon the first occasion, I lay overcome by a transient flight, lest the intruder might take a notion to stab or otherwise injure me. Upon the second occasion, when satisfied that I had been left alone once more, I arose and lighted the gas. An examination showed me that the door was locked; there was no other door out of my room but that one, as you will observe. The chimney is, as you see, so narrow above the grate, that not even a monkey could have come down and departed that way. Yet some one or something was assuredly in my room!"

"Have you missed anything?" the detective asked, thinking that he was about to hear another announcement of a mysterious robbery as a parallel to the lost diamonds of Dimble's case.

"Nothing," she answered, somewhat to his surprise.

And she pursued:

"Whoever, or whatever it was, the object does not seem to have been robbery. And there were inducements enough; for, look here!"—arising and stepping to the bureau.

She came back to a position before him, extending to his gaze several rich rings, a watch enameled and set with tiny diamonds and a narrow band of gold, worn as a tiara above the forehead, whose only gem was a single, large and lustrous diamond of striking brilliancy.

"These have lain on the bureau at night, on each occasion of the mysterious visit of which I

speak. You see, there could not have been any robbery intended, else they would not now be here."

She returned the jewelry to the bureau, now placing it in one of the drawers, however.

The detective's eyes were following her. He had made a singular discovery.

The solitary diamond in the tiara was a counterpart, though larger, of the sample shown him by Dimble as one of those stolen.

"Dimble said they were all of one size, though," he argued; "so this cannot have any possible connection with those he has lost. A mere chance resemblance, I suppose."

Miss St. Dyer returned to her seat before them.

"But the third occasion of the mysterious intrusion is what I now have to speak about particularly," she said, with her black orbs fixed on the men alternately. "I had retired last night as usual, when, as I half-expected, I heard the unmistakable sounds of some one moving about the chamber. Now, though I had lain awake after the first coming of the dark visitant, I invariably fell into a doze preceding the knowledge that I was not alone. The same last night. I was aroused, and knew that there was another than myself in the apartment."

"But my previous nervousness had in a measure worn away; I leaped up, determined to solve the riddle. A few steps I took, when I came in contact with a form which I reasonably supposed to be a man. But at the very moment I grasped this form, and ere I could utter the shriek for help which was upon my lips, something happened which you may hardly believe."

"What was it?"

"Suddenly, as by magic, I found myself embracing a column of glowing flame, in which was the outline of a man, and at the same time I received a shock as from an electric battery, which hurled me to the floor. When I recovered from a condition of partial insensibility, and when I had strength to light the gas, all was in order and quiet as the grave, without the slightest trace of any one having been in my room. The door was securely locked on the inside."

She paused.

The detective and the hotel proprietor looked at one another in a way that showed they had similar thoughts.

This thought:

"The woman is given to the use of opium, perhaps. What she has been relating is the outgrowth of the visions of the drug."

"What do you wish me to do, if anything?" the detective asked.

"You will not let this remarkable thing drive you from my house," said the proprietor, who liked the beautiful guest and her prompt manner of paying bills.

"Not until I have found out what this 'singular thing' means," she replied firmly.

Daniels saw that she was a girl of pluck.

The proprietor drew a breath of relief.

Between the diamond robbery and this mysterious tale of Oriole St. Dyer's, if both got out it would injure him immeasurably.

Again, as he had done in the room of the diamond drummer, Daniels looked about him.

This room opened also on the high, flue-like area-way in the center yard or court of the hotel.

There was no possible facility for anything human, or of the lower order of animal, to climb up to the window.

"Miss St. Dyer, have you any enemy that you know of?"

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I would also like to ask whether this man—and it seems to be a man—offered you any harm."

"Not the slightest."

"So you cannot possibly imagine who it was?"

"I cannot possibly imagine what or who it could be, that they should be able to resolve themselves into a column of flashing flame."

This matter of the intruder having performed the incredible feat of melting into a column of flame caused the detective to almost doubt the sanity of the girl.

He could not help bestowing upon her a keen glance which she noticed.

"Why do you look at me in that way?" she asked.

"Because, Miss St. Dyer, we are not living in the days of the Arabian Nights, when such feats as you mention were performed at the will of genii."

She saw that he did not believe her statement.

"What I say is true, sir," she declared, in a nettled tone.

He merely bowed.

"What do you make out of it?" the proprietor interrogated.

"I am at a loss—for the present. Do you wish me to investigate this affair as well as the matter of the diamonds?"

"Assuredly! My dear sir, my house will suffer if such occurrences are not stopped."

"I will see you again," Daniels said, shortly.

"You did not arrange with Mr. Dimble what

your reward was to be if you recovered the diamonds," reminded the other.

The detective gave him a severe look; but it was too late.

Miss St. Dyer asked quickly:

"Has there been a robbery committed in this hotel?"

The two men saw that she was scenting so close that it would be useless to try to conceal the fact from her. Making the best of the misfortune caused by the proprietor's hasty speech, Daniels said:

"A slight affair, yes—"

"But you remarked something about recovering diamonds. Have any diamonds been lost?"

She appeared to be even persistent.

"Yes, miss, some diamonds have been lost."

She would have put further questions, but with some abruptness Daniels left her.

The proprietor followed into the entry.

"Mr. Daniels, I sincerely trust that you will endeavor your best to unravel both of these mysteries—especially the one this young lady is excited about. What do you think of the idea she has, that the man turned into a column of flame?"

"That it is simply ridiculous."

"What can be the cause of her belief?"

"Have you noticed anything unusual about her actions since she has been a guest here?—here, I mean," and he tapped his forehead significantly.

"Oh, to the contrary. I have been impressed with the fact of both her beauty and intelligence."

Immediately upon uttering the words, the proprietor added:

"Sh!"

A peculiar looking party was approaching along the entry.

A tall and slender man attired in a full suit of glossy black, whose footsteps made scarcely any sound upon the carpet, seeming to glide over the soft texture at a rapid rate and with no effort.

His face was of a striking mold, with its skin of waxy whiteness, prominent nose, over the lips a mustache of raven hue that was long and terminating in twirled ends.

His hair, also very black, was long and wavy, reaching down on the shoulders carelessly.

But the eyes, most of all, were the item about him which puzzled the beholder. Black as jet were they, brilliant and piercing, restless and roaming, reflecting a mind that would baffle the reader of faces in an attempt to solve the character of the owner.

And as the detective covertly glanced more particularly at the eyes—his habit when looking at a strange face always—something seemed to impress him forcibly.

"Where have I seen those eyes before?" passed perplexingly in his brain. And then, as suddenly: "Ah! I have it, I think!"

Just such eyes—black, large, lustrous to the contrary of what the full black eye usually is—he had noted in Miss St. Dyer, a few minutes before.

The person passed them, with a bow of recognition to the proprietor, and with the bow a smile that displayed teeth as white and regular as ever were the boast of a ball-room belle.

"Who is it?" Daniels asked.

"He? Oh, that is the Italian professor."

"Professor of what?"

"Music. He came to live at the Mansion about three days ago, and says he is endeavoring to establish a class in the city, without looking further north."

"Three days ago?"

"Yes."

They walked off along the entry and descended the staircase.

Hardly were they out of sight, when the man designated as the professor appeared suddenly at the corner of the distant angle in the corridor and looked after them.

The same smile—the half grin—which had been on his white face when he saluted the proprietor, was on it now, and he toyed with the ends of his long mustache as he came back along the entry, pausing at the door of Miss St. Dyer's room.

For a few seconds he remained with his black eyes fixed upon the turn beyond which was the staircase, and he nodded his long-haired head in a strange way.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE VISITOR AT THE AGENCY.

WHILE these scenes were transpiring at the hotel, another scene was in progress at the Agency which Daniels had so shortly before left.

Within a few minutes after the departure of the famous detectives in answer to the summons from the hotel proprietor, a visitor entered the Agency and asked for the chief.

"Not in just now, sir. But if you will be seated for a few moments, I think he will be here."

"Thank you, I will wait."

The caller was the same whom we have seen a little prematurely gliding along the corridor of the hotel, and who was designated by the proprietor as the Italian professor.

He appropriated a chair and leaned lazily back in it, to await the return of the chief for whom he had particularly inquired. The jetty, brilliant eyes were roaming restlessly around the office.

The senior member of the firm presently appeared.

And as he was pointed out by the clerk, the professor arose and advanced saying, in remarkably good English for an Italian:

"You, sir, are the chief of the detectives?"

"Of this private firm—yes. Can I be of service to you?"

"Perhaps. I would have a word with you."

"Step this way, then."

And as he led the way to the back room, the senior was impressed with the singular countenance of the man.

"I have, I think, a most remarkable case to relate," said the English-tongued Italian, when they were seated.

"What is it, sir?"

"A case of murder and robbery."

"Rather common cases, both, nowadays."

"But this particularly."

The detective remained silent, waiting for his visitor to come out.

"I am, sir, an Italian. But I have traveled much, and am the master of many languages. Ten years ago, in my native land I was mixed up in a grand crime—as a sufferer, mind you. I will give you the outline of it. I shall take a little of your time, if you can spare it; for I tell you that I wish to engage you upon an intricate matter which is now the outcome of that crime."

"Proceed."

"There lived, at the date I mention, at the Italian capital, a very worthy family of some means, named Catazky. Pedro Catazky was the son of Italian and Russian parents—at this time a man of family, with one daughter, then not over twelve years of age, surely. Catazky had accumulated considerable wealth. He discovered that his daughter, Anice Catazky, had become deeply enamored, even at her tender age, of a menial in her father's household. Of course, as you will imagine, this occasioned much trouble. Catazky had a stormy talk with his child, who further enraged her father by the announcement that not only did she love the fellow, but they were already married by the indissoluble ceremony of the priest."

"In the ending of the interview, Catazky utterly disinherited the love y Anice and ordered her from his house, telling her to seek the low fellow she had accepted in preference to a fond father's love. Ah—and the professor made a shrugging gesture—"had she but simply done as she was told to do by that angry parent, all would have been well; for her husband, though indeed no mate for her—reared in luxury and educational advantage as she had been—would have continued to adore her and make for her a very devoted partner. But Anice Catazky was of a fiery nature for a child—she could hardly be called more than this, though a wife. She was given twenty-four hours in which to take herself away. Within that time happened the strange crime I am about to disclose."

"Quite early on the following morning, the police were notified that Pedro Catazky had been found dead in his bed, and that an investigation was desired, because he had been known to be as nearly in perfect health as a man could be. The police and the doctors both were brought in. And the very first person who laid a hand on the body of the dead man fell over as if he was himself stricken with death. Another touched the corpse a moment later, but was not similarly affected. There was, you see, a grave mystery surrounding the death of the man Catazky, eh?"

The Italian's eyes contained a peculiar glitter as he paused, in this half-inquiring way, gazing intently at the other.

"Some mystery, it must be admitted," assented the detective.

The Italian continued:

"An examination of the body showed that nearly all the organs were in a strange state of paralysis. But all the skill of the physicians was baffled by the case. No one could tell what had caused the death of Pedro Catazky. Meanwhile, the daughter, Anice, had disappeared. She was searched for everywhere that she would likely be; she could not be found. Then came a rumor that the quarrel of the father and the daughter—which had been unfortunately overheard by some of the servants—had something to do with the death of Pedro Catazky. Her absence at the time gave an impetus to this conjecture. Was it not cruel that the daughter should be suspected of so horrible a crime?" and again he looked strangely into the face of the attentive detective.

"Yes, it was cruel."

"But, mark you; there was one who knew, in that city, that Anice Catazky must indeed be guilty of the crime of her father's death. And while the authorities were looking into the matter suspiciously, because she was her father's heiress—he having died thus suddenly before having had time to alter his will so as to disinherit her—this one I speak of, this one who

knew that she had committed the crime, was trembling in his shoes lest the probing spies of the police at last ascertain the cause of the mysterious death and pounce upon the man who could explain it.

"In a certain locality lived one Guiseppe Duoro, a manufacturer of electric apparatus. On the afternoon of the day the night of which was signalized by the death of Catazky, there called upon Guiseppe Duoro a veiled female. Not so closely veiled, however to prevent his recognizing the beautiful child of Catazky. She wanted, so she said, a machine that would, at a single shock kill an animal or a human being. She had a favorite spaniel that was suffering with spasms, not continually, but periodically. She had at last determined to kill the pet, and believed the stroke of electricity to be the quickest means in which there was no time to experience any pain. Considerate of her, was it not, eh?"

"Oh, quite," rejoined the detective, who, while he listened was engrossed with trying to read the peculiar countenance of the man before him.

"Yes, it was considerate. She was very careful to repeat again and again the inquiry whether the shock would be certain death, and she said to this Guiseppe: 'I hope you will make no mistake about my want. I am sure that my pet, the spaniel, will be very hard to kill; the shock must be heavy—understand, I say heavy—heavy enough to kill a man. The constitution of the spaniel is as strong as that of a man. And I have no wish to disfigure my beautiful spaniel. The apparatus must be of a kind that can be applied without leaving any mark.'

"Ah, she was particular about it, eh?"

"Well, she procured of the man, Guiseppe, a little box so small that it could be carried in the pocket. By placing the box on the head of the animal, among the hair, and by touching a spring which released a magnetic point to come in contact with the head, there would be at once delivered such a shock from a battery within the box, that nothing human or of the lower size of beasts could possibly survive. This was the contrivance that Anice Catazky procured of the electrician, Guiseppe Duoro.

"Well, the next day, Pedro Catazky was a corpse. And Guiseppe knew that it was not a spaniel for which the deadly box was wanted. He knew that the beautiful child-wife had killed her father that she might still inherit his wealth. But she had disappeared; she has never been seen. Why? Because the revelation which Guiseppe at last made, in the terrors of his remorseful conscience, showed the authorities exactly how Catazky had died and who was his murderer. The husband of the lovely Anice had also vanished. But it was well known, by testimony that was volunteered by companions of the fellow Anice had married, that he could not possibly have been a party to the crime or a party to her flight, for after having been discharged from the service of Catazky, he went into France, where he was for some years held under secret police surveillance, which surveillance convinced the Italian authorities that he did not even know where Anice Catazky was. But, mark you, the chase was and is still being kept up for the apprehension of the constantly-fleeing Anice. She has been traced to America; she has been seen in this very city. And there are papers ready, under special treaty between America and Italy, for the apprehension of her and such as her. In addition, there is an enormous reward waiting the lucky finder of the murderess.

"I am here to tell you this and to give you a description of her. There is a chance of a great reward for you when you shall have found her and presented her to the Italian Consul."

"You say this girl has been seen in Baltimore?" questioned the detective.

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Myself—these eyes of mine."

Strange and dangerous eyes, thought the detective.

"Then why did not you yourself cause her immediate arrest?"

"Ah, my dear sir, I have said that I was a sufferer by the crime of this beautiful child-wife."

"I believe you did."

"I will tell you more. Behold in me an unlucky scion. I am of a noble line; but like many, I became reduced to the position of the common servant and was forced to hide my accomplishments, else the proud family of Catazky would never have permitted me to enter its service through fear of the very thing which did eventually happen—that is, the winning of the affection of the daughter of Pedro Catazky."

"Oh, then you are—"

"Pietro Idello, the husband of Anice Catazky."

CHAPTER IV.

TWO DETECTIVES ON A TRAIL.

"AND because of this fact," the Italian pursued, "I have lost the best part of my life through a wasted affection. I could not, would not, live with one who was the murderer of her

father. I saw her once after the commission of the terrible deed, and while she pleaded in vain, on bended knee, for a restoration to my heart, she did succeed in exacting a solemn oath from me that I would not then and there give her up to the law. I was, as I told you, under surveillance, and could not leave France for years after this. In all that time, my mind was in a condition it is impossible to describe. This beautiful being had broken up my life by her perfidious deed; more, she had wrecked the life of her aged mother, who died soon afterward from the effects of the shock of her good husband's violent death. As soon as I could, I began a search for her. I determined that such a devil as this child wife should not go unpunished; I joined in the chase after the murderer of Pedro Catazky. But, that it is solely with the desire of bringing a criminal to justice, you may see by the fact that I would not be the one to bring her before the consul where the reward will be promptly offered."

"The Baltimore Consul is advised of the affair then?" queried the detective.

"Yes, fully."

"Do you know more of the girl than the mere fact that she is in the city?"

"Nothing."

"Describe her to me, please."

"She is of good height for a female—her age now about twenty years. Her eyes are as black as midnight, and they are not dull and cold, like many black eyes, but shine with a magnificent luster. Her hair is noticeably elegant, even when confined, and she at times has the habit of wearing it loose over the shoulders, as was her custom in her younger days; this too is very black. Her complexion is of the usual darkness of a child of Italy. Her manner is prompt and vigorous, of a fearless kind, notwithstanding the nightmare of her crime. In all she is a charming young lady of speech and manner, and has a penchant for diamonds."

"How long has it been since you saw her?"

"This very morning."

"Why did not you follow her?"

"I came straight to you. It is for the detectives to follow the young and beautiful fiend. I wish not to ever so much as stand face to face with her. Besides, she was gone from my gaze on the crowded street before I was sure of its being her."

"Very well, I will look into the matter."

"You understand, I do what I do only for justice," said the Italian, in a voice that was whiningly soft.

"Oh, I understand," rejoined the detective, who was busy jotting down the description of the girl who was wanted by the Italian authorities for murder.

And when his visitor had withdrawn, after giving his address, he said to himself, musingly:

"There's something behind this. I do not like the looks of a lover husband being so eager to put the hounds of the detective force on the trail of his wife, even for the crime he mentions. Pietro Idello—let me not forget that name also. I consider this Pietro Idello a strange character; I do not like the glance of his eyes—snaky and treacherous eyes."

The chief had other business to engross him just then, and the matter of the beautiful patricide was for the time banished from his mind.

He was interrupted in the back office by the entrance of Mark Daniels.

"Anything in the wind?" he asked, noting a studious look in the face of his brother professional.

"Yes, and I don't object to telling you of it."

"Spin it out then."

The mystery of the hotel was related to the chief.

At its conclusion a keen expression glanced over the countenance of the senior.

"Describe this girl to me—the one who has, you say, a diamond precisely similar to those which have been lost, in all points save the matter of size."

For instantly he recollected the declaration of his recent visitor, that Anice Catazky—or rather Anice Idello—had a penchant for diamonds.

And when the description was given, he exclaimed:

"I think this young lady who calls herself Oriele St. Dyer is the thief who stole the diamonds of the drummer, Dimple."

"Why do you think such a thing as that?"

Daniels was very much astonished.

Then to Daniels was given the memorandum of the recent visit from the Italian.

At the conclusion of which Daniels in turn exclaimed:

"Why, the man you have described to me, lives at the same hotel with Miss St. Dyer—not with her, but in the same hotel."

The two gazed at one another.

"Mark, my friend, I believe there is some remarkable plot at work here."

"Looks very much like it. And let me say that such a thing as the young lady's having taken the diamonds is simply impossible," and Daniels went on to explain the improbability of any access to the drummer's room.

"Yet somebody has been in that room," reminded his chief.

"I must confess that diamonds cannot walk off."

"Let me give you a suggestion."

"What is it?"

"Keep an eye on this Oriele St. Dyer."

"I think I will, anyhow. I don't altogether like her story of a man who resolved himself into a column of flame—bah!" and at the recollection of the assertion, he seemed to be disgusted.

It was a fortunate resolution of Mark Daniels's to watch Oriele St. Dyer, though he had no definite idea why he did so resolve—fortunate for the young girl, as an after event was to prove.

When Daniels had left the Agency, the chief nodded his head in a reflective way and muttered:

"And I shall make it my business to find out more about this man who calls himself Pietro Idello. Until I have accomplished that, I shall not act in any way on the suspicion that the young girl is the Anice Catazky who murdered her father. I will visit the consul to see if such a murder was even committed."

At the close of that day both detectives were absent from the Agency.

The senior was at the Mansion House, registered as a guest, and disguised so that even the proprietor, who under other circumstances knew him well, had not the slightest suspicion of his identity.

Around the huge stove which had only a few days before been erected in the space in front of the counter sauntered the keen-eyed slouch looking for the personage who called himself Pietro Idello.

And by a little diplomacy, coupled to a familiarity with the rooms of the hotel, he had secured an apartment that adjoined the one occupied by the man he was bent upon watching.

At about the same hour Mark Daniels was approaching the hotel for another interview with Dimple.

He wished to ask that individual whether it was positive that all the diamonds which had been made for the actress's coronet had been of the same size.

He was still impressed by the resemblance of the diamond in the tiara of Miss St. Dyer, shown to him that day.

As he advanced along Fayette street a female form brushed rapidly past him.

There would have been nothing striking in the mere fact, but the passage occurred at a lamp, and though the female was just then engaged in fastening a veil over her face, she had not so far accomplished this as to hide from the detective the features of the very party he was then determined upon watching—

Oriele St. Dyer.

She appeared to be in great haste as she moved eastward.

Immediately he turned and followed her.

Had she recognized him?

No matter.

Before she reached the blaze of the electric lights in the vicinity of the monument he had completely altered his appearance, after the usual detective fashion when following a quarry.

Onward went the girl to Gay street.

Here she turned to the left toward the bridge.

Gay street bridge, on its western footpath, is, by night, but little used. Though the street swarms with people, beyond either end of the bridge, it is remarkable that there are comparatively few upon the bridge itself at any one time.

On the bridge, near its center, Oriele St. Dyer paused and glanced around her, as if expecting to meet some one there.

The great electric globes on the elevated lamps at both ends of the span showed the detective plainly every action of the girl; and though her eyes were searching about her, she seemed not to see or heed the shadowy form that had followed her and was creeping light-footed near in the shadow of the network of high railings and girders.

Presently the figure of a man advanced swiftly from the Front street side of the bridge and paused before her.

The words that were uttered came plainly to the ears of the lurking detective.

"You call yourself Oriele St. Dyer?"

"That is my name. You see, I am here in answer to the mysterious missive that was cast over the transom to-day."

And she added, in a tone that was a demand:

"If you were the one who cast that paper into my room, tell me what you want—what it means?"

"Ha, ha, ha! So you feared to disregard the summons, eh?"

"What is it you want?" she repeated.

"To say to you, Anice Idello, that if you do not immediately give me five hundred dollars I shall expose you to the law. Come, I am very short of funds, and you shall supply me, or I will place you where you should have been placed long ago at the Italian capital!"

A moment's silence followed. There were some passers-by.

And the listening detective listened more attentively.

CHAPTER V.

MARK DANIELS GRAPPLES A MAN OF FIRE.

THE girl presently spoke.

Her voice contained an unmistakable surprise, mixed with the accent of one who desired to conceal it.

"You call me Anice Idello."

"Why should I not?"

"And the note which was tossed over my transom to-day, and which is the cause of my being here to-night, also addressed me as Anice Idello."

"Oh, it is a very beautiful name."

"Well, my name is not Anice Idello."

He laughed gratingly.

"No?"

"What is it you have to say now? What is this exposure you mention as being in store for me, if I refuse to be blackmailed by you?"

He took a quick step to her side and grasped her by the wrist in a painful way.

Into her ears hissed a terrible voice; close to her face gleamed a pair of eyes as fiery as the scorpion's.

"You are playing a game of chance that is to cost you your life, Anice. Now that I have altered my voice to its natural tone, you will recognize in me the man of all men on earth who knows no relenting. Ha! I am Pietro Idello!"

If the man had any reason to suppose that, for some secret cause, the pronouncing of the name would terrify the girl, he was mistaken.

Erect she stood, and flashed back his glance with mingled defiance and indignation.

"I do not know why I should fear any one by the name of Pietro Idello!" she said, calmly.

He gnashed his teeth.

"Sdeath! do you forget that it is an easy task to kill a Catazky? Beware!"

"You are a riddle to me, sir. Come, if you have nothing important to say—after throwing over my transom a note that promised a revelation urgent in the interest of my very life—you will please to unhand me and allow me to depart!"

"Beware!" he hissed again. "You cannot hide your identity from me—and from the law if I choose to give you up. Give me what I ask, and I will put you on your guard in a way that will save you—"

"I have no cause to fear the law. True, I have a secret in the past of my life; when the mysterious missive was hurled over the transom, I thought to risk seeing the author of it, in the hope that I would learn something which I have vainly sought for many years. I see you must have mistaken me for some one else, and that you know nothing of the secret I am anxious to unravel. Unhand me, sir!" the last sharply.

Her calmness and denial that he could possibly have any hold upon her seemed to enrage him beyond all control.

"Anice Idello, I shall kill you!"

"Unhand me, I say, or I will call for help."

"Before you can do that—"

Instead of completing the sentence, he gripped her in his arms and bore her bodily to the rail over the black water of Jones's Falls.

At that instant, onto the bridge, from the Front street side, came bounding a messenger of the American District Telegraph Company, the electric star on the front of his cap blazing and seeming to radiate across the shiny surface of the peak straight upon the strange scene that was being enacted.

There could be no misinterpreting the intention of the man Pietro Idello.

He was about to hurl Oriole down into the watery filth of the falls, to drown or suffocate in the mud there; and it was at one of those moments before described, when the bridge, especially the western footpath, was deserted.

The appearance of the telegraph-boy seemed to accelerate the villain's movements.

Notwithstanding her struggles, the girl was presently poised in mid-air over the rail—another instant and she would be dropped to her death.

The boy saw and comprehended.

A cry went up from the lips of the lad, and he bounded forward as if to intercept the dastardly deed.

But another was quicker than he.

Ere the shriek that was rising to her lips could sound, Oriole saw a figure leap from the shadows of the iron network near and toward the ruffian who held her.

And even in that transient moment of extreme peril, a singular thought passed athwart her brain, while she grasped at the rail to save herself.

"Heaven be praised! I shall be rescued without attracting attention to myself, which would be the case if I called for help upon the passers-by!"

The detective, who had been creeping nearer and nearer, at this critical juncture bounded

forward to prevent the commission of the intended crime.

The Italian saw him, and in the instinctive motion of resenting an assault, he released the girl, letting her fall bruisingly against the rail, while he turned to meet the rescuer with an oath.

He did not recognize Daniels as the man who had been with the hotel-proprietor in the corridor.

Without a word, Daniels grappled with the Italian.

He had heard enough to convince him that a murder was intended, and he thought it advisable to get this so-called professor of music behind the bars while certain matters were being investigated.

Then something transpired which was fairly startling.

Even as he grasped Pietro Idello, that personage seemed to suddenly resolve himself into a mass of glowing flame from head to foot. Like a furnace he seemed, as seen through monstrous windows of mica, though there was no perceptible heat.

And simultaneously the detective received a shock as from an electric battery which hurled him back and prostrate on the bridge.

The flare—for it was a flare of light that instantly vanished—attracted people who were not on the bridge; several paused to see, if they could, what the singular thing meant.

The telegraph boy halted in amazement.

Oriole St. Dyer, standing and gazing, riveted, upon the stricken form of the detective, paid no heed to the swift form making for the Frederick street side of the bridge, where it disappeared around the corner.

She advanced to the body on the planks.

"Are you hurt, sir?"

It seemed that no serious harm had befallen Mark Daniels; but he was for a time completely bewildered, and when he could regain his feet, he said:

"You have had a narrow escape, miss."

She did not see in the man before her the same who had visited her room that day with the hotel proprietor.

"I owe you many thanks, sir. Had it not been for you, I am sure I would have been murdered."

"Do you know who it was, miss, who meant to throw you over into the falls?"

Her immediate reply rather puzzled the detective.

"I have not the slightest idea."

His question had been the natural one of a person rescuing a young lady from the malice of a villain. Her response puzzled him because it indicated a possibility that the conversation he had overheard might have been true in the portion which was her avowal that the man was mistaken in her identity—she was not Anice Idello.

Daniels realized that there was some deep game in progress now, beyond all dispute.

The Italian had visited the Agency and set the suspicion of a murder on the girl. He had there threatened her with the law; he had declared that it was an easy matter to kill a Catazky. Was this remark a taunt, or did it contain some other significance?

This person who called herself Oriole St. Dyer had a secret in her past life; so intense must it be, that she had come unattended from her hotel to meet an unknown who hinted at something in connection with that or another secret.

And something had now transpired which showed the detective that the recent assertion of the girl—that there had been a man in her room who resolved himself into a column of flame—was not so improbable as at first thought.

He had experienced the phenomenon himself.

"Shall I call a hack?" inquired the telegraph boy.

"Let me see you home, miss," requested Daniels.

"Indeed, I will take it as a favor."

Away went the lad, his gleaming star of electric fire flashing through the night.

In a few moments the detective was seated in the conveyance with the strange and beautiful girl, being driven toward the Mansion House.

At the entrance he left her.

Entering the lobby before the counter, he was a little surprised to notice there his senior.

He easily recognized that personage, for the disguises of each were known to the other.

Daniels gave a sign.

The two stepped out to the portico.

"What's wanted?"

"I imagine you are trying to spot the Italian."

"Yes."

"Well, he's not in the house."

"Oh, yes he is."

"But I know better, for I have just seen him on the Gay street bridge," and he proceeded to give the other a full account of what had transpired, including the circumstance of a man having changed himself, apparently, into a column of fire.

"There is a big mystery here."

"What I think."

"But I have an extra reason for saying so."

"What is it?"

"The man, Pietro Idello, was in this office

about ten minutes ago. He went up-stairs—having come in the first place from up-stairs—and I followed to my room, which adjoins, and watched him don a smoking-jacket and seat himself for a smoke. I am sure that he has not been outside of the hotel for or within an hour at least."

"But he was on the Gay street bridge, and attempted to kill the girl, as I tell you."

"And I tell you it is impossible that it could have been him."

The two detectives gazed at one another in a way that was somewhat blank.

CHAPTER VI.

ANOTHER REMARKABLE THEFT.

MARK DANIELS and his senior were at this moment attracted by a commotion within the hotel.

Glancing through the glass of the large folding doors, they saw that the excitement was at the front of the counter.

A man stood there, with bulging eyes, his hair almost standing straight, and the whole expression of his face one of frantic dismay.

It was the drummer, Dimble.

"Come inside," said Daniels. "That is the party who has lost the diamonds. Something fresh has occurred to startle him. Perhaps he has met with an additional loss."

They entered and approached the counter.

Daniels was now in his own proper person.

Dimble was gesticulating wildly and uttering a string of exclamations that were almost cries, in which were the words:

"The diamonds! Oh—oh—the diamonds!"

The detective was right in his conjecture: something had happened indeed.

And now all the cautionary signs and whispers of the hotel proprietor could not quiet the drummer, who half-screamed, as he recognized the detective:

"Ah!—ah!— Oh, the diamonds! My dear sir, I am ruined now beyond all help! I shall go mad! I will be put in prison!"

"What is the new matter?" Daniels inquired, placidly.

Here the proprietor, having come from behind the desk, grasped Dimble by the arm and fairly forced him away toward the clerks' room at the rear of the office.

The two detectives followed.

When the door was closed, Dimble sunk into a chair as if exhausted, and groaned:

"Ah, they are gone—they are gone! And I will be put in prison, for I can never replace them."

"What has happened, Mr. Dimble?"

"I am utterly ruined, I tell you! I will be put in prison," and he groaned, dismally.

"Oh, you must not be so altogether disheartened about the diamonds you lost the other night. I have taken some steps. Let me tell you what has been done so far. Every pawnbroker shop in the city is posted and on the lookout for the gems; the authorities of several other cities have been furnished with an accurate description of the missing stones. There are some other little professional technicalities working, which it is not necessary for me to inform you of. But do not despond at this early phase," said Daniels, who thought that his remarks might relieve the man's mind to some degree.

But Dimble started forward to the edge of his chair, and his eyes were protruding as he cried:

"You are talking of the gems that were lost the other night?"

"Certainly."

"And I am talking of a whole bagful of gems and other jewelry, which I have lost since sundown of this day!"

All gazed at him in astonishment.

"Articles to the value of thousands and thousands of dollars are gone! Do you comprehend? My valise, with everything it contained, has been stolen from my room while I was in a doze on the bed, and with my door securely locked—mind that!"

Then more in detail, he told how he had lain down on the bed for a short nap before supper. He had overslept himself: it was dark ere he awoke. Lighting the gas, his first glance was to see if his valise with its precious contents was safe in its corner near the head of the bed.

His dismay is easily conceived when he discovered that it had mysteriously disappeared.

It seemed impossible that any one could have entered the apartment.

The mystery of the hotel robberies was growing phenomenal.

But the persuasions of the two detectives combined at last brought Dimble down to a condition of comparative quiet, and Daniels accompanied him to his room, where another and closer examination of the apartment was made—with a result as before; that there did not seem to be any mode of ingress whatever, if the door should actually be locked.

Daniels examined the lock; it was all right. When the key was turned, the door held firm.

While thus engaged, he obtained from Dimble a description of the valise itself and a greater portion of its contents.

"I do not think the thief will venture away from town just yet with so much booty," he

said, encouragingly. "Meantime, let me beg of you to keep as quiet as possible about it. I shall try and bait this fellow."

"Try what?"

"Try a bait first. If that fails, then we must go to work indeed. It is no common thief we have to deal with. Listen to some instructions I wish to give you."

A whispered conversation ensued.

Presently both went out, having extinguished the gas.

About an hour later, Dimble came back, carrying in his hand a new valise. And when he had once more lighted the gas, he opened the valise and spread out on the round table in the center of the room, a dazzling display of jewelry, with which he toyed as if examining it in the keenness of a business calculation.

Then he undressed and climbed into bed in a most natural manner, having put out the gas, and the jewelry was allowed to remain exposed on the table.

A second later, the door of Dimble's room opened and a man in stocking-feet glided in.

Dimble gaped. The visitant hissed warningly.

This visitant was Daniels.

The detective locked the door after him noiselessly and then glided toward a cupboard-like closet which he had noticed at one side of the room on his former examinations.

Stillness reigned.

Hours passed.

Dimble was snoring loudly.

Wide awake and on the alert, however, was the detective. He experienced some disgust, that a man who professed to be so alarmed at the loss he had sustained should so easily enjoy a sound slumber while steps were taking to catch the mysterious thief. But Dimble was surely slumbering soundly.

And for a moment, a thought seemed to pass in the detective's mind that perhaps Timothy Dimble did know more about the mystery than he had cared to betray.

If a vast deal of trouble and fuss was created, it might serve to cover up some complicity on the part of the drummer in the robbery.

Motionless as a carved image stood the sleuth in the dark confinement of the closet.

Keen were his ears for the slightest unusual sound.

There was the occasional tramp of lodgers seeking their rooms along the hall without; but at last the silence of death fell upon the hotel.

Then his steady vigil was rewarded.

With the door of the closet shut entire save a small crack to permit of a breath of fresh air, and the room being in total darkness, it was impossible for him to distinguish anything that might transpire in the room.

But his alert ears caught a faint noise that could not have been made by the slumbering Dimble.

Just the slightest perceptible rattle in the direction of the round table, as of some hand cautiously gathering up the jewelry which had been purposely left there by the drummer.

Slowly the detective pushed open the closet door.

But keen as were his eyes, he could not distinguish anything in the darkness of the room.

And still the sound—the faint, scrappy sound—as of a hand that was either picking up or collecting into a pile the jewelry on the table.

Further opened the door of the closet.

Stealthy as a cat the detective crept toward the gas-burner, a patent, never-miss-fire fuse in his hand.

Then, quick as a flash, the burner was lighted.

As the room was thus illumined, Dimble awoke.

He started up in bed, exclaiming:

"What's the matter?"

Mark Daniels's eyes were fastened in a gaze upon the round table, and his face was the picture of intensest astonishment.

"Look there," he said, leveling a forefinger.

Dimble stared.

The surface of the table was almost entirely cleared of the jewelry that had been there so shortly before.

If ever a man felt himself utterly baffled, that man was Baltimore's famous detective, Mark Daniels.

What manner of thief could this possibly be?

The door was still locked; the window was tight down; no one could have been in the room, unless of a supernatural presence—yet a greater portion of the jewelry was gone.

The plan to bait the thief had failed.

And by the remarkable circumstance, Daniels knew that the drummer was not concerned in the robbery as he had for a moment suspected while hidden in the closet.

"Mr. Dimble, you have been robbed again. It is my own loss this time, however. And I will unearth this mystery if it absorbs both a lifetime and my life."

"I am afraid I was asleep."

"You were."

"And while I slept, and while you were watching, do you tell me that there has been another robbery committed in this room?"

"That is about the size of it."

Daniels became very thoughtful.

He was sure that some one must have been within the room.

For the third time he examined every foot of wall surface and the edges of the carpeting. He half-suspected that there might be some secret mode of access. But the search revealed nothing.

While this was transpiring in the room of the drummer, a young and handsome man entered the hotel office and advanced to the counter with the inquiry:

"Is Miss St. Dyer stopping here?"

He appeared to be a traveler just arrived in the city, and there was that about him which indicated a true gentleman beyond all question.

"She is."

"I must see her."

"It is rather late, sir. I am afraid she has retired by this time, and we hardly like to disturb—"

"It is imperative," interrupted the young man. "And if you will convey word to her that Robert Rathwaite is here, she will see me at once, I am sure."

The clerk tapped the bell obligingly.

A waiter was dispatched to the room of Miss St. Dyer.

He presently returned with a scared look upon his sallow face, and announced:

"Not dar, sah."

It was noticeable that he was laboring under a nervousness of some kind.

The clerk eyed him sharply.

CHAPTER VII.

MYSTERY UPON MYSTERY.

Is anything the matter at Miss Dyer's room?" asked the clerk, apprehensively, as he gazed sharply at the darky.

"Dunno, sah. I didn't go in—"

"Go in! Why, is her door open?"

"Yes, sah. An—an' 'pears to me dere's a smell o' brimstone roun' de place up dere."

At that juncture the proprietor himself appeared, coming from the rear room, as was his custom, after a brief nap, every night at about the hour of midnight.

"What is it?" he interrogated.

"Something wrong up in Miss St. Dyer's room," replied the clerk, uneasily.

Instantly the proprietor ascended to the room.

The darky and the young man who had just arrived accompanied him.

At No. — the door was found to be ajar.

Several raps failing to elicit any response, the proprietor entered and groped forward in the darkness toward the gas-burner, striking a match as he went.

When the jet shed its light on the surrounding, a universal exclamation of amazement that contained some horror filled the room.

The bedding was disordered and strewn on the floor, and on some of the linen there were red stains that surely looked like blood.

Oriele St. Dyer had vanished.

An examination of the bureau-drawers, where the proprietor knew she was accustomed to keep her jewelry, showed that the valuable baubles had been extracted.

It was a scene that suggested both robbery and murder.

But if a murder, where was the body of the victim?

While they stood aghast, there was another little scene in the corridor near the room of the drummer, Dimble.

Daniels had emerged to seek his senior to consult upon the remarkable robbery that had been committed, under his very nose, as it were, when, to his surprise, he met that personage almost at the door.

"I was coming after you," said the senior.

"And I was about to do the same," rejoined Daniels.

"First, what have you to communicate?"

The remarkable occurrence of the robbery was related.

The chief was as much puzzled as his partner.

"And I," said the former, "was coming to acquaint you with the strange fact that the Italian, Pietro Idello, is not in his room, though I saw him enter there, left him there, know that he could hardly have passed out of the hotel by the entrance without my seeing him; and what is strangest of all, his gas is burning low, still bright enough for me to make out through the spy-hole, that the door is both locked and bolted."

"There is more mystery here than I think we will be able to solve," remarked Daniels, who was, to tell the truth, somewhat discouraged at the condition of affairs.

For there seemed to be not the slightest clew for him to commence work upon. If anything was accomplished, it must be by a stroke of mere chance and the usual wide-awake faculties for which he had been hitherto noted.

While they thus stood, a footstep sounded along the corridor and in a few seconds they were joined by the hotel proprietor.

He was a party to the plot of the detective to bait the thief who was robbing the room of the drummer.

He knew that the detective was in Dimble's room.

The recent discoveries in the apartment occupied by Miss St. Dyer was bringing him now to introduce this new mystery to Daniels's notice.

Without pausing to describe what he had discovered in the young lady's room, he said:

"Mr. Daniels, please step this way with me—your friend will excuse you—"

Daniels interrupted.

"Let me introduce to you a brother detective. Smith is his name. We are working together on this diamond business."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Smith."

He had no idea that the man with whom he shook hands was one well known to him as the senior of the firm of West & Co.

"Come this way, please. I am very much worried, and I think there has been a murder committed under this roof."

"A murder?"

The two sleuths exchanged glances.

What next was to be developed in this as yet uncertain trail they were upon?

And West, like his partner, was working then—having a spell of leisure on his hands—more for the sake of unraveling a mystery than anything else.

At the room of Oriole St. Dyer, they glanced at one another again. The sight that was presented was certainly startlingly suggestive of a red tragedy.

But the same idea possessed both at once.

If a murder had been committed, where was the body?

It would be an almost impossible matter to take a dead body from the hotel.

After an examination of the stains, the supposed Smith said:

"Blood!"

And Daniels echoed, as he bent over the disordered linen:

"Blood!"

The proprietor was really alarmed for the reputation of his house. Never in all his hotel experience had anything of this character transpired under his management.

Daniels said:

"Blood, sure enough. But I do not think there has been a murder committed."

There was a modest tug at his sleeve.

He turned to face the young man who had come to the hotel to see Miss St. Dyer and who gave his name as Robert Rathwaite.

"You are a detective?" he asked.

"That is my business."

"Do you think that Miss St. Dyer has been killed?"

"Why are you so interested?"

"Because she was my promised wife. I have come from Chicago to make her my wife by her own appointment. We were to meet on this very night at this hotel. But for an accident to the engine between here and Point of Rocks, I would have reached the city before dark. It is not a pleasant thing for an expectant husband to find—this—" and he pointed to the stained linen.

The voice of the senior was then saying—and it attracted the young man:

"It looks very much like foul play, sir. But there are certain evidences which, to a detective, warrant my saying that I do not believe there has been any murder committed. And until that point is definitely settled, I would ask that you have this room absolutely excluded from use.—Ha!"

He suddenly advanced and gripped the darky by the collar, dragging him into the room and closing the door.

"Look you, you black rascal!" he said, sternly. "If you so much as breathe a word about what you have seen in this room, I will have you sent 'over the falls' for a period so long that it won't be pleasant—"

"De Lor', boss. I ain't done noffin'."

"No, but we'll retain you as a witness and I have known witnesses to be confined in jail so long that they wished they never had known anything about a case."

"Fore de Lor', boss, I won't say noffin'!"

Robert Rathwaite took a room at the hotel, after some conversation with the detectives.

And these two sleuths departed for their office to hold a conference.

Before dawn, the whole force of that private Agency was set upon one of the strangest of complicated cases that had ever come under the notice of the Baltimore detective force.

The matter of the diamond robbery; the disappearance of the beautiful girl, Oriole St. Dyer, for whose discovery Robert Rathwaite, the young Chicago grain merchant, had offered a large reward, and the mixed evidence of the Italian, Pietro Idello, whose story, as related to the senior detective, had thrown upon this young girl the suspicion that she was a patri-cide for whom the Italian authorities had a standing reward.

For Mr. West had visited the consul and ascertained that such a criminal was really wanted—had long been wanted—in the Italian capital.

Early next day, and after but the slightest apology for a snatched nap of repose, Daniels

started out, disguised, to visit a "fence" which he knew (or suspected) existed in the vicinity of the wharves below Thames street—a junk shop, to all appearances, but with the adjunct of a dwelling at its rear that was inhabited, yet never known to be visited by any one in daylight.

Of course he did not expect to find among the rubbish with which the outer shop was strewn, anything of the valuable jewelry stolen from the hotel.

Yet he entered and began poking about with a switch-like cane which he carried as a part of his disguise, as if wanting to find some particular article.

"Wot you will haf, my frient?" inquired the little Jew who was the owner of the shop.

Daniels glanced around as if he had something to say which he did not wish another to hear.

"People don't want to buy all the time, Jacobs," he answered with a significant nod.

"Aha! how you wos know my name was Jacobs," rubbing his hands together in a pleased way, while his eyes twinkled. "I haf not Jacobs on t'e sign, eh?"

"Well, I reckon I know you. Say, you buy things, don't you?"

"Sompimes—yahs. Wot you haf to sell, my frient?"

"Diamonds."

"Mine Got!"

He threw back his head with an expression of unbounded amazement.

"Diamonds! Wot!—you half come here to sell diamonds! W'are you t'ink I get money enough to puy diamonds—such t'ings like dot, eh?"

"Oh, come, if you don't buy, say so. I was told by a pal—"

"Aha! a pal tolt you. Very well, my frient, if you haf a leetle diamond—a very leetle diamond, not wort' much, I maybe puy of you. W'are is de diamond?"

The disguised detective gave him a look of disgust.

"Do you take me for a fool? Do you think I am going to haul out such things in this shop, where somebody will come in and see what we are up to?"

At this point a man entered and passed rapidly to the rear.

He wore a slouch hat and an immense beard of raven hue.

But the detective could scarcely repress a start as he saw in the face above the beard a pair of eyes it was impossible to mistake.

The orbs of the Italian, Pietro Idello.

In all his experience with criminals, it was impossible to deceive him in the matter of such remarkable eyes as the Italian possessed.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPING A DETECTIVE.

IF the party who entered the junk shop was Pietro Idello, then he and the Jew proprietor were on secretly intimate terms, for he continued straight back to the building at the rear—though not without exchanging a sign with Jacobs, which was also observed by the keen-eyed sleuth.

Giving this last comer time to get well back and out of sight, the Jew said:

"W'are you get t'e diamond wot you haf to sell, my frient?"

"Look a-here, do you want to buy a diamond?"

The speaker's tone was that of one who does not intend to be pumped in regard to a business transaction.

The Jew winked.

"Come mit me."

He led the way to the house behind the shop.

Daniels carefully noted the surrounding as he followed.

In the front of the dwelling there was an apartment very similar to the old-style arrangement of pawnbroker-shop stalls, where a person might stand and transact business without some other patron being able to see his neighbor.

The Jew whisked out of sight for a moment—and appeared again behind his counter with a broadly-grinning visage.

"Let me see dot diamond, my frient."

The detective asked himself whether this fellow was indeed, as he suspected, a mere keeper of a "fence" or a regular pawnbroker; and if the latter, did he have a license?

Mark Daniels had in his pocket at the moment an admirable imitation of one of the diamonds which had been described to him by Dimble—a paste affair made to his order on short notice. This he now produced.

The Jew took and examined it. And in a moment burst into a low laugh.

"W'are you stole dot?" he asked.

"Stole! Who said I stole it?" demanded the disguised detective, in a simulation of mixed indignation and alarm.

"Com', com', my frient. Now you haf hat your trouble for your pains. Dot is no diamond."

"You think I stole it?"

"Yahs, I know it."

"You know it! Look here, Jacobs, we might as well be confidential."

"Yahs."

"I was at a heap of risk getting that; my pal told me you were just the party to give full value for it—"

"So I woult—so I woult, my frient. But dot is no diamond."

"I got it for a diamond."

"Stole him, you mean."

"No matter. Now, I am sure it is a diamond. What makes you so sure it is not?"

"Hist! I show you somet'ings. I will show you von diamond shust like dot was by t'e cutting, unt you see t'e difference."

A diamond just like it in the cutting!

Alert indeed was the detective now. It hardly seemed probable to him that he was to fall so easily on the trail of the drummer's missing diamonds as this promised.

In his whisky way the Jew vanished and was gone for several minutes. When he returned, he held up in his hand—carefully beyond reach of his patron, however—a diamond that Mark Daniels could have sworn was one of those described to him by Dimble.

The two stones, when compared, clearly betrayed that the one the detective had brought to dispose of could not be anything more than an imitation.

"You see, my frient, dere wos one shust so like yours; you t'ink dey wos de same. Not so. You wos foolt. I woult not gif so much as twenty-five cendts for de stone you haf—dis—well maybe it was wort' some huntrets of dollars. But I mind somet'ings. Dot stone of yours wos cut to similar precise as t'e one wot I haf. I believe you haf got him from t'e same party."

"Maybe so," admitted Daniels, reluctantly.

"Aha! you wos young at dot business"—with one palm elevated at a crooked angle and wiggling wisely backward and forward. "When you wos olter, you know t'e difference between t'e diamond and t'e paste. Why, my frient, I haf a daughter who knows so much better as dot," and raising his voice he called: "Rachel! Oh, Rachel—com' here."

From a door somewhere behind the stalls, the location of which the detective could not discover, a prompt footstep advanced.

Then there was an occurrence which well nigh threw the experienced sleuth off his mental balance.

A beautiful girl appeared behind the counter at the side of the rat-faced Jew.

A girl of nearly twenty years of age, with a dusky, not Jewish, face: whose eyes were as black as the pramion and with the luster of winter's stars.

Her hair, tastefully dressed, was a mass of opulence, and surmounting a magnificent brow was a golden band set with a single diamond in the center.

It was Oriole St. Dyer, and on her head was the piece of jewelry which herself had shown to him in her room at the hotel at the time of recounting the mystery of the man of fire.

He was reasonably staggered.

"Rachel, you will tell t'e shentleman wot you t'ink of dot stone," handing her the imitation.

"I think it is worth about two dollars," she said, at once, when her lustrous eyes rested on it, and almost before she held it in her hand.

At that instant a small, gong-like bell sounded somewhere behind the Jew.

"Stop a leetle, my frient," he said, with a significant nod. "I t'ink you wos not long at t'e business, and I haf somet'ings to say maybe for your goot and mine if you stay long in t'e city Baltim're. Stop a leetle."

In answer to the bell, he drew out of sight.

The girl simultaneously, and without having said anything more, glided away toward that door which the detective could not see from the stall in which he stood.

He had certainly struck another mystery.

What could the lovely Oriole St. Dyer be doing in the fence of this Jew? And she was the girl whom Pietro Idello had charged with being a felon for whom the Italian authorities were seeking. And Pietro Idello himself was at that moment under the same roof, on terms of acquaintance with the man Jacobs! If there was any truth in the statement of the singular experience of the girl with a man of fire in her room at the hotel, then Pietro Idello was that remarkable personage, for Daniels had had a similar experience in contact with him—the most unaccountable experience of his life.

As he stood there waiting, to see what it might be the Jew had to say, he glanced idly about him.

And almost instantly his eyes rested on something in a far corner which caused him a great start.

In that corner was a valise.

A new, brown leather valise, with gilt clasps, and on a shield in front a graven eagle.

The very kind of valise described by Dimble as having been lost by him with all its contents of valuable jewelry.

With a hasty glance around to make sure that he was alone, he tip-toed to the valise and examined it.

Yes, there could be no mistake. He had at least, by a most unusual piece of luck, struck something like a clew to the culprits in the diamond robbery.

Dimble's diamonds must be in this place.

But he wished to accomplish more than the mere recovery of the gems. As important to the sleuth was the apprehension of the adroit thief who could make off, in comparative invisibility, with his plunder.

Daniels thought his action of inspecting the valise was unobserved. But brief as had been that examination, there were a pair of sharp and malevolent eyes witnessing his movements unseen from a tiny hole at the rear of the space before the box-like stalls.

Jacobs reappeared.

The disguised detective was in his former position.

"My frient, I tole you somet'ings. I t'ink I haf made a mistake. I t'ink Rachel not know so much as she pelief. I haf look! at dot stone again. Let me show you"—bringing from under the counter a small pair of hanging scales. "I haf weighed dot stone. It was goot weight. I haf t'ink perhaps de ot'er feller wot brought de stone wot looks like yours haf not stole all—you haf by de greatest chance get t'e last—"

"Let up, ole man," interrupted Daniels, with an injured air.

"Oh, dot wos all right, my frient. I haf deal wit' a great many peoples, you onterstant. Now, you look"—elevating the scale. "You see, t'e stone you wos brought to me wos goot weight ant I pelieve I bargain mit you—Sh! some one wos coming in der shop. You shtep dis way, pehint t'e counter, w'are I haf my room for sooch customers," and he made a beckoning sign.

Following the direction of the hand, Daniels walked to the rear of the shop and through an opening in the counter.

He had made a discovery, however. The stone which the Jew had weighed was the one which he had brought forward to compare as the genuine, and not the one which Daniels had offered for sale.

What sort of game was being played now?

The sleuth was eager to investigate.

Jacobs met him at the opening and conducted him into a room through a very narrow door.

In the apartment were piled a mass of mixed goods of tedious description.

"Sit you down, my frient. Dot stone wos wort' more as I haf t'ought at fir-rst."

He placed a stool, adding:

"My daughter, Rachel, tent to de gustomer wot wos shust com' in, while I bargain mit you for dot diamond. How much you want for it, eh?"

"I don't know, old man. What will you give?"

"Ah, I wos not puying and selling too."

"Well, give me four hundred dollars—"

"My gracious! wot you say?"

As the words left his shriveled lips, something transpired that was totally unexpected even by this experienced man-hunter—unexpected, because it was so old a dodge that it was hardly looked for, and because nothing had occurred to give him a suspicion that this old Jew could mean him harm on so short an acquaintance.

It showed that even the best hands at a suspicion are liable to be misled.

Without warning, the floor yawned beneath the detective's feet, and he and the stool went pitching downward into a black hole that emitted a foul vapor the moment the trap was thrown open by its cunning spring.

As he went down, he saw the weazen face of the Jew bending forward to witness his fall, an expression of devilish triumph in the hairy lineaments.

CHAPTER IX.

A PROBABLE MURDER.

As the detective disappeared below the surface of the floor, the trap, on its cunning springs, was at once readjusted, and with a remarkable quickness.

This very quickness was what shut out from the sight of the murderous Jew the fact that to some extent his plan to kill his patron had failed.

Mark Daniels was an acrobat of no mean order.

As he fell, he performed the half of a somerset, and caught, by a mighty gripe, on the under edge of the pit where the joists rested on the ground.

Thus he hung, painfully, with his shoulder blades nearly wrenched asunder, but safe nevertheless, and the trap above him closed.

He was in total darkness.

But by drawing himself up, he managed to crawl between the two joists that there seemed to rest on a cemented masonry, and pausing for a second to rest after the unusual strain of muscle, he distinctly heard the sound of voices in the room from which the treacherous Jew had hurled him.

The voice of Jacobs was saying:

"Dot wos goot! Ho! dot wos very goot, don'd you t'ink?"

"Good? Yes, Simon Jacobs, it is better than you imagine. Do you know who that is we have sent down to the bottom of your convenient pit?"

"N-o-o—"

"I do. It is one of the most indefatigable detectives of this city. And by what I showed you through the peep-hole, he was investigating the presence of that valise in the other room. You may infer from that how keen is this particular sleuth; he is already scenting close to the diamonds."

Ah! diamonds they were talking about.

And the last speaker was probably Pietro Idello, though Daniels could not distinguish exactly in the man's tones whether they were the same as those of the man who had so miraculously changed himself into the column of fire on the Gay street bridge.

"Hide that valise," continued the supposed voice of Pietro Idello. "You had best give it to one of the rats to-night and have it sunk in the basin—"

"Look a you here," broke in the Jew. "I haf not anything more to do mit dose wharf rats py de Locust Point. I was afraid of my liberty py dose vellers. Dey make me some troubles one of dose days—"

"What mean you? Are you not a sworn member of the gang? Do you intend to do anything like dirt—?"

"No, no; my goot Pietro," whined the Israelite.

Pietro! Ah! the listening detective caught the name eagerly.

"Umph! Well, do as I say. Give the valise to some one of the rats at the meeting to-night, and when it is sunk in the basin—where the body of that accursed detective is by this time—we need not have so much fear for ourselves. We will go to Europe with our little booty and live in luxury for the balance of our days. Ha! what is that? I am sure I heard a noise under the floor, Jacobs. Raise the trap and let me take a look. Perhaps that fellow did not go all the way down."

In some trepidation at the idea that the murderous job might have miscarried, the Jew hastened to let the trap fall a second time, and the two looked long and with listening ears down into the abyss.

Seeming satisfied that they must have made an end of the man whom the shrewd Pietro had discovered to be, or suspected to be, a city detective, the trap was restored to its original fastness, and Pietro said:

"That is the first intimation I have had that they are after the thief who got the diamonds from the hotel. They have kept pretty quiet about it up there, and I believe the haul made last night was a trap to catch the thief. But they failed—ha! ha! ha! they failed miserably. No one can catch Electro Pete when he nabs the wealth of the unwary!" and the Italian indulged in another laugh, suppressed and chuckling.

Probably never did a detective chance in such a place for the gathering of information as Mark Daniels now was.

Every word uttered by the pair was eagerly drank in as a most important discovery.

Pietro Idello, then, was the wonderful thief who could extract plunder from a secured room, and by means that defied even the lurking watcher who had set a bait on the round table the night before.

Daniels was as much determined to ascertain the means of the performance as he was to arrest the robber.

"Now then, the girl. Come, I shall make a last effort; and if she does not yield, mark you, I shall keep my threat. I may get the Catazky wealth in Italy with her out of the way as well as with her for my companion. And I—I alone—can clear her of the charge for which she is wanted at the Italian capital at this moment. Come—the girl!"

There could be no doubt that these remarks had reference to Anice Idello—the Oriole St. Dyer of the detective's acquaintance, and who was then known to him to be so mysteriously within that very house.

What could the Italian villain mean in regard to her?

And the Jew was strangely interested in whatever was being played by them, for he said:

"Yahs, yahs, of she don'd yield her to what I haf say, ant what you shall say, den by shimmenetys! we make our little game mitout t'e aid of Rachel, eh?"

"Yes!"—with an oath. "Come."

Daniels heard their tramping feet leave the room.

More, he could hear them ascending a flight of steps to a room, probably in the second story.

A door opened and closed. Then all was still.

Satisfied that his enemies had departed, he set immediately about an investigation of his chances for extricating himself from his extraordinary predicament.

He crawled forward away from the edge of the pit between the heavy joists, feeling the planking above him at intervals as he went.

He hardly expected to find an outlet, and was greatly surprised and delighted to find, suddenly, a giving way in the floor above him in the cramped space.

He had reached another trap.

What the utility of this second trap might have been he did not pause to consider. He only realized that it afforded him an opportunity to complete his escape from a violent death, and within a few seconds he was standing in a dark entry which he judged was a part of the house occupied by the Jew.

Voices sounded as if coming from above.

He was now "in for it," to use the term, and on tip-toe he ascended the stairs, which he discerned when his eyes had become accustomed to the surroundings.

At the head of the stairs, a door.

Beyond the door the voices of the Jew, of Pietro Idello, of the girl, Rachel—and the latter was assuredly the voice of the girl, Oriole St. Dyer, who had so mysteriously disappeared from the hotel.

The upper entry, like the lower, was very dark.

Through the key-hole of the door there came a faint streak of artificial light, as if the room was darkened, too, and a lamp or gas was burning.

Those within the room were not in the line of vision afforded by the keyhole.

Daniels could not see anything of the persons whose voices he heard. But he heard this:

"Look you: I have my watch in my hand. By it, I give you thirty seconds to decide. You will go back with me to Italy and acknowledge that you were lawfully wedded to Pietro Idello, and assist him in gaining the estate of Catazky; or I shall kill you here and go myself, with such testimony as will give the husband of Anice Idello (or Catazky) a share in it. You understand me? Be quick with your choice!"

The voice of the whining Jew:

"My tear Rachel, you haf been one jackass long enough. Do as he says, and all will pe well—"

"Oh, father! father!" wailed the voice of the girl. "How can I do it? I am not the wife of Pietro Idello—"

"Bah! I am counting. Thirty seconds!" exclaimed the Italian in an angry accent.

A terrible silence fell.

The detective decided that a murder was about to be committed in that room.

He knew by the tone of the girl that she might hesitate too long, while her mind was debating something that appeared to be wholly abhorrent to her.

The thirty seconds were slipping by with awful rapidity.

Looking to his revolver, Daniels raised his fist and gave the door a mighty thump.

The thump was to distract the attention of the two villains from the girl.

Next, and instantly, he hurled himself against the door.

Simultaneous'y there was a prolonged and curdling shriek inside the room, as of some one in excruciating agony.

"Ah!" muttered the sleuth, with a desperate vehemence; "they have slaughtered her before I could get to her!"

Again he hurled himself against the door.

The obstruction gave way.

He went pitching into the apartment.

All was darkness.

But a patent fuse was in his hand in a trice.

Its small flame lit up a room that was darkened by curtains of extraordinary heaviness, and the glance he cast about him on all sides showed him that the apartment now was vacant.

Idello, and the Jew, and the girl had vanished.

But something on the carpet at his very feet attracted him.

A large red stain and wet.

Was it blood?

Had the two villains indeed killed the helpless victim and dragged her away through some secret passage?

He did not linger in the room more than a minute.

Hastening down the stairs by which he had gained the landing, he succeeded in reaching a door, and passing out at this into the light of day, he found himself on the line of the wharves that front the basin.

Hardly had he taken a step, when a hand fell upon his shoulder, coming from around a brick wall at his side.

"Daniels!"

It was the voice of his chief. And he continued:

"What were you doing in that house?"

"Working the diamond trail. You had lost sight of your quarry, hadn't you?—for I saw him in there a moment since."

"By no means. I followed him here."

"Step this way. I have something to tell you."

Daniels and his chief walked through an archway toward Thames street.

CHAPTER X.

STEERING A COUNTRYMAN.

As they emerged on the thoroughfare, Daniels observed that the junk-shop was still open, and more, there was the Jew himself, busily engaged with a customer.

The detective had altered his disguise while

walking through the archway, so that Jacobs, though he gave a glance at the two who passed his shop, did not recognize the man whom he believed to be at that moment at the bottom of the pit which had its outlet in the basin.

Going a short distance, they entered a saloon.

"What is it you have to say?" inquired the senior.

"I have seen Oriole St. Dyer."

"Where?"

"In the building at the rear of the junk-shop. And I am greatly afraid that this time she has been murdered indeed."

"What have you discovered?"

Daniels related his experience within the house.

"I do not believe she has been hurt at all."

"What is your reason?"

"Your interruption of the scene was too prompt for their intentions; they may have suspected that it was you, risen from the pit; the blood-stain on the carpet may have been but a blind to get you onto another trail."

"Why get me on another trail?"

"To cover the trail of the diamonds."

This was not altogether improbable.

"Besides," added the senior, "I can tell you something that will greatly astonish you."

"What is it?"

"The girl you saw in that 'fence' was not Oriole St. Dyer."

"But I am sure it was—"

"The more sure you are, the more mistaken you are."

And when he had enjoyed his partner's surprise for a few seconds, the chief said:

"I saw the young man, Robert Rathwaite, and the girl, Oriole St. Dyer, in Patterson Park early this morning. I followed him from the hotel and witnessed a deliberate meeting between the pair. They did not remain together long. He returned to the hotel; she disappeared toward Canton. I concluded that I could now easily keep track of Oriole St. Dyer, by watching the movements of the young man, so I followed him, and when he was safe back again in the hotel, I went to the Agency and there met—who do you think?"

"Who?"

"The man I have determined to investigate: Pietro Idello."

"At what hour was this?"

"A little after ten."

"Impossible!" declared Daniels. "The man, Pietro Idello, was in that junk-shop back there at the hour you mention."

"I will show you how you are mistaken. He had called to ask if anything had been done toward the arrest of Anice Idello, saying he had learned of her whereabouts—naming the hotel—and had also learned that she had left there. I gave him very little satisfaction, and when he left, shadowed him into Harrison street, where he procured a disguise. From there I followed him here. It has not been twenty-five minutes since I saw him go into the junk-shop."

"Look here, West—"

"Well?"

"There are two Pietro Idellos."

"Perhaps. And what about this Oriole St. Dyer?"

"The same regarding her."

There was a twinkle in the senior's eyes.

The query of his next words was a stunner.

"And what about this gold band, set with a single starry diamond, which was the property of Oriole St. Dyer?"

A gold band set with a single diamond was not an unusual thing. But it will be remembered that Daniels, at his first interview with the beautiful girl, had noted that this particular diamond was cut precisely according to the description given him by Dimple of the lost diamonds, and but for the fact of the drummer's assertion that they were all alike in size, as well as cutting, the detective would have suspected Oriole in connection with the robbery.

It was hardly likely that two diamonds, owned by different persons would, by chance, be cut so alike.

There could be no doubt that the diamond in the band worn by the girl called Rachel, was the identical diamond shown to Daniels by Oriole St. Dyer; and the likeness of Rachel to that lady was so striking, that he felt he could not be mistaken in regard to her identity.

His theory then was that if his partner had seen Oriole St. Dyer at the park, he had seen only some one who greatly resembled her.

While they sat thus, the senior suddenly pointed toward the window, saying:

"Look there!"

The window was one of those through which a person on the inside could see all that transpired on the pavement, while a person on the outside could not see anything of what was going on within.

At the curbstone was standing a young man with a small sachel suspended from his neck, its halves forming a box-like tray. Between his fingers he was manipulating a lot of small, flary red papers, and at the same time both hands fairly bulged with greenbacks of the denomination of ten and twenty dollars. Several hundred dollars he evidently had there, and the notes were being adroitly folded within the

small slips of paper and dropped into the tray before him among a heap of other and precisely similar papers.

The "capper" was before him, with an attitude of absorbing interest; others soon followed suit, until quite a little crowd was congregated around this individual who seemed to be possessed of so much wealth, and who, as recklessly as a millionaire, offered the bystanders a choice of any three papers in the tray for one dollar, after a thorough mixing.

Five times had a twenty-dollar bill been dropped into the tray (4) and five tens had been following while he made an announcement:

"Take your choice, gentlemen—any three papers in the lot for one dollar, and the understanding that you shall not open them until you are one square from here. You have three chances for a twenty—maybe all are prizes. I can afford to be liberal this morning. Will you try your luck?"

It was an old dodge.

But this was not what attracted the senior detective.

Both saw and recognized in this personage who was swindling in a most genteel manner, no other than the young man, Robert Rathwaite.

No grain merchant of Chicago would be up to any such game as that in the streets of Baltimore.

The Chicago business, then, must be a blind.

"A very industrious lover has Oriole St. Dyer," remarked the chief, grimly.

"Very."

A thriving trade did the young man push among the denizens of Thames street.

When the crowd began to hesitate at last, he folded up his valise and sauntered off—the capper following at a distance.

The chief arose.

"Where to?" asked Daniels.

"To follow that young man. I want to know what sort of game he is mixed up in."

"I shall lay low until to-night."

"And what then?"

"The rats of Locust Point," laconically.

"Ah!"

Daniels's partner had for the moment forgotten the other's allusion, in his recital of what he had overheard in the Jew's house, to some organization which seemed to be known as the Rats of Locust Point, and which was to receive from Jacobs that night the sachel, or valise, of the drummer, Dimble, for total destruction.

The entrance to the saloon had double doors.

As the senior passed out he paused for hardly more than an instant to make a change in his appearance.

When he emerged he had the appearance of being a well-to-do farmer, and was just then making as if to store away a pile of money, change, probably, from the price of a drink, for he wiped his mouth at the same time with a copious colored handkerchief.

His movements soon placed him beside the man who had acted as capper for Rathwaite.

And his eyes glistened as he saw the wealth of the supposed countryman so recklessly displayed.

"Why, Mr. Brown, how do you do? When did you get down from Bel Air? And how is the trucking business?"

The countryman drew back suspiciously.

"My name is not Brown, sir, but Castlemon—John Castlemon, I am not from Bel Air, but Westminster, and I am not a trucker, sir, but a bee-keeper—"

"Oh," profusely, "excuse me; but I was sure it was Mr. Brown, whom you greatly resemble. No harm done, I hope?"

"None, sir," stiffly.

As the man drew back a twinkle was in the detective's eye.

"Aha! wait a minute. I smell a rat," he muttered. "I think this will lead to some information of the man who calls himself Robert Rathwaite."

At the first corner something transpired which, to all appearances, filled him with intense amazement.

Coming around the corner at a rapid pace was Rathwaite.

At sight of the countryman he paused short with an exclamation of pleased surprise:

"Why, Mr. Castlemon! I hadn't expected to meet you here! How are the bees?"

"I don't think I know you, sir."

"Don't know me! I was at college in Westminster last year. My name is Bannock—son of Senator Bannock, you remember. I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Castlemon."

He forced his hand on the countryman, and a hearty shake followed, Castlemon seeming to rather relish the salutation from the son of a senator.

"Ahum! yes, I think I do remember you now," he admitted. "You were over to see my daughter and wife about a lot of hives your father wanted—"

"Yes, yes, I am glad you remember."

"How did the senator like your purchase for him?" inquired Castlemon, giving a plain cue.

"Oh, first rate. I have an idea he will want to increase the apiary before long. Which way are you going?"

"Well, I've just been up to get the money from a large sale to a merchant on south Broadway, and I want to get to the depot—"

"But I am in the city, on my way back to college, and as college is such a tedious place, you know—"

"Yes, I know."

"I thought I would see the town a little bit. But, unfortunately, I have to wait in this neighborhood until I can see a friend who has all my money—money given me by my father before I left home. I have his due-bill—for it was a loan—though that will not avail me. I will see him this afternoon, and if you will wait till then, we will be companions on the train to Westminster."

"Very happy," agreed Castlemon.

Arm in arm, and chatting familiarly, the two turned back over the way John Castlemon had come.

"Mr. Castlemon, you are an older man than I am, and maybe you will not approve of what I am about to do."

"What's that?"

"I have a dollar or two in my pocket, and I know a way to double or treble it in an hour or less."

"Why, how can you do that?"

"If you will just come and look at the operation, and promise that you will not say anything up in Westminster about it, I'll show you."

"I'd like to know," said the countryman, with undisguised interest in the assertion that money could be doubled and trebled in an hour or less.

Rathwaite led the way to the junk-shop of the Jew.

Jacobs received them with a blank inquiry:

"Wot you want, shentlemens?"

The young man made a sign that was understood as intimating that he wished to visit a certain room in the rear.

Had the supposed countryman been of a suspicious turn, he might have paid more attention to the fact that Rathwaite seemed thoroughly familiar with the premises, and also that, as they passed through the junk-shop, a clear-toned and small gong-like bell sounded somewhere in the rear.

They entered by a door at one side of the building.

It was a bare room—bare in all save that in the center was a table where were three men.

One of the men was manipulating a dice-box; the others were looking on with great interest.

Hardly had our party gained a position beside the table, when the man with the dice-box uttered something very like a curse and dived into his pockets for a roll of bills, out of which he handed one of the men several dollars.

"You'll break me, if you keep on that way," he remarked, ruefully, and nodding to one of the men.

The winner—for he had evidently won some money by the turn of the dice—laughed lowly as he gathered in his pile.

The detective saw in one of these men, the man he had spotted and followed to the junk-shop as Pietro Idello in his Harrison street disguise.

"The ball is rolling," he thought. "If Daniels and I never discover anything else, we are in a fair way to break up a gang that seems to be in existence in Baltimore, whose object of organization is robbery by both genteel and nefarious means."

Rathwaite was nudging his companion's arm.

"Did you see that?" he whispered.

"Yes. What are they doing?" was the innocent rejoinder.

"Why," still in a whisper, "that fellow who is tossing the dice is a sharper—at least he thinks he is, and he is trying to win the money from these two fellows. I have seen them here before. But they are older birds than he—"

"Older what?"

"Older birds. Watch. There they go again."

CHAPTER XI.

A LITTLE "BUNKO."

THE pretending countryman leaned forward to watch the game of tossing dice with interest.

From the corner of his huge spectacles, however, he was casting covert glances upon the Italian, Pietro Idello, also disguised and simulating an absorbed interest in the game.

Again the stranger won.

"Now watch me," whispered the pseudo son of Senator Bannock, "I am going in on my own luck. Fate is against the banker to-day, and I shall win, I am sure."

He staked a small amount and—won!

Another amount, and—won!

He doubled and won.

"Come in, come in," he urged, to the countryman. "Now is your time, while luck is beating the bank."

"I can't stand this much longer, gents," remarked the dice manipulator, in his chagrin.

An enthusiasm seemed to suddenly possess the countryman.

"Here," he cried, "I want to take a hand in that. How do you do it?"

Glances passed around the table—glances unperceived by the greenhorn. Here was an easier prey than the most experienced had had hold upon for some time.

It required but little instruction for him to be able to join in the game, which he did right heartily, and soon winning his share.

"There will only be one more bet," said the man with the dice, rather sharply. "Make it lively, gents, for, win or lose, that will close it."

"I will make my bet for all I am worth," said the fellow who had been winning so far.

"How much is that?"

"Two thousand."

"Very well. And you two gentlemen—what say you?"

"I am in. My bet is on the five."

"Four for me," said the first.

"Three for me," spoke the detective, keeping the retrograde rotation of numbers.

A pile of money was on the table.

The eyes of the three confederates were gleaming as the countryman had said, producing a check-book:

"I have not the two thousand with me. I am two hundred short. I suppose my check is good for a stake—that is what I believe you called it, wasn't it? Mr. Bannock here knows me, and he knows my check will be honored."

"Certainly, certainly, that is all right—"

"And how do I know anything about Mr. Bannock?" demurred the dealer. "You have been winning hard money from me; if I win now, I would like to have the same."

But after a little haggling—just a little, lest the countryman might have time to alter his mind and withdraw both money and check—it was satisfactorily arranged.

The check for two hundred dollars, and the balance in cash, was deposited on the table.

The dice-box rattled and the little square pieces clicked down on the table.

"Raise the cup, if you please, sir," to the countryman.

Castlemon did as requested—and lo!

On the board were three sixes.

The dice sharp had won all their wealth on the closing bet.

More, he held a check from a supposedly responsible individual who, strangely, only shook his head and turned from the room without a word, like one utterly crestfallen and ashamed to say anything about his loss.

Rathwaite watched him till he had passed out through the junk-shop—observing that, as he went, he stooped for a second, as if in the act of picking up something.

Then he turned to his confederate with a laugh.

"Well, that is about the greenest I have come across yet!"

"Let us make no loss of time in having this check cashed," suggested he who was the man the detective believed to be Pietro Idello in disguise.

"Right for you, Electro Pete; and you, Bob—you go and get the money. Eight hundred in half an hour is no small gain."

Rathwaite departed with the check.

As he left the junk-shop, he looked around for some sign of his country friend. But that personage seemed to have taken himself off and afar.

The young man did not go at once to a bank. He leaped onto the platform of a car, and a short while afterward alighted at a saloon not far from the falls, where he obtained a private room for the asking and a dollar paid.

From an inside pocket, he drew a patent pen and ink tube.

Also some blank paper.

At a table he seated himself and began scribbling industriously.

In an incredibly short space, he arose and held up to the light near the window for inspection, the check he had obtained from the countryman by the trick of the dice.

But its figures were wonderfully altered. It was not now a simple check for two hundred dollars.

The word "two" had been altered to "twelve;" the figures in the lower left-hand corner were \$1 200.22 100 "

"Aha!" he muttered, as he contemplated his criminal work. "I think that will do. Now then for the money. Luckily I have an acquaintance in the —th National Bank."

And out and toward this bank he started.

Meantime, be it not supposed that the veteran detective purposed being coolly swindled out of the money he had lost in the sharps' den.

And a wonderful den appeared to be this junk-shop of Jacobs, the Jew, adding his experience to that of his partner, Daniels.

As he was leaving, he saw something flutter down through the air and fall almost at his feet.

A folded paper, fresh from the hand that had folded it, he saw, by its cleanliness.

It was this that Rathwaite saw him stoop and pick up, though not attaching any importance to the action.

He slipped it into his pocket, not caring to

examine it until well out of the place; and having discovered what kind of a place it was, he kept his eyes warily about him, lest he be waylaid there in the yard, in broad daylight, by those who might suspect that he carried more money about him.

On the street, as he moved away, he unfolded the piece of paper and read this astonishing line upon it:

"I am a prisoner in the house of Jacobs, the junk-dealer, and my life is in danger! Save me if you can—any one!"

"By thunder!" he exclaimed. "Whoever this girl is which Daniels seems to think is Oriele St. Dyer—when I know that Oriele St. Dyer was with that dice-capper, back there, in the den, at Patterson Park at the moment Daniels thought he saw her—whoever she is, I think she is in danger—not already murdered, as Daniels apprehended. But I must take the step I had planned in regard to that check business, first. Then, if there is anything in this appeal for help, I will investigate it."

Straight to the eastern station on Bank street he went, and a few seconds later, when he had introduced himself to the captain—for of course he was not recognized in his uncouth disguise—the wires were notifying every bank in the city to be on the lookout for a party with a particular check, a minute description of which was given.

Long before the individual who was reasonably supposed to be Robert Rathwaite had completed his "raising" of the check in the private saloon, every paying teller in the city was on the alert for that check.

From the station he telegraphed to his own agency and ordered a telegram to be sent to the chief of police of Chicago, inquiring regarding a supposed grain broker, Robert Rathwaite by name, and requesting any brief information that could be given regarding his character.

"Now then," he muttered, when this was attended to, "I shall investigate the peril of the young lady who seems to be menaced by the villainous gang of that junk-shop. Who is she?—for I am satisfied that she cannot be Oriele St. Dyer."

And just at that moment it occurred to him that the note contained no signature. Perhaps it was not even the girl who was in danger of losing her life.

Be it who it might, West resolved to thoroughly overhaul the building at the rear of the junk-shop.

He had observed that the house had a side yard, and a high fence separated it from the adjoining property.

It was no easy matter to gain ingress in broad daylight.

But in the disguise of a rag-picker, he advanced by an alley-way at the extreme rear, and by patient means at last found himself standing within the inclosure of the premises.

Forward he could see the Jew, engaged with some customers.

No one appeared to be near.

And not ten feet from him was a cellar door.

With a final glance around, to make sure he was not observed, he stepped to the dive and raised one of the halves, for there was neither lock nor bolt upon it.

An instant later he had disappeared down the joisted steps.

Producing and igniting a patent fuse, he took a brief survey of his surroundings. He was in a very ordinary cellar, and at one side were a flight of steps.

Though all was as still as death, he immediately extinguished the fuse, after that hasty and keen glance about him, and groped toward the steps.

Ascending these, he came to a door; and cautiously opening the door, he stepped into a room that indicated some of the comfort the Jew was accustomed to enjoy, (from his ill-gotten gains, the detective at once concluded) for it was furnished in an almost extravagant luxury.

In the center of the apartment was a large table, the brocade cover of which dropped fully to the floor.

And while the venturesome sleuth was pausing there to take a cursory inventory of the place, an item was transpiring which, had he been aware of it, would have caused him to debate whether he was as safe in his stealthy entrance as he then supposed.

A man in a garb that displayed every outline of a half skeleton form hurriedly entered the junk-shop from the gate at the rear within two seconds after the detective had vanished down through the cellar door.

He whispered something in the ear of the Jew, notwithstanding the latter was busy at the time with a customer.

A breath that was long and aspirative escaped the Israelite and his eyes rolled above his beard in a comprehensive way.

Stepping to one side of his littered shop he touched a little knob that was almost invisible in the wall, and the same faint, distant sound of a small gong bell was heard.

After sounding this secret bell, he withdrew from the shop, leaving the skinny anatomy who had come in to wait upon the customer.

CHAPTER XII.

BURIED ALIVE.

As the detective paused to survey his surroundings, he heard footsteps approaching.

His first impulse was to retreat down the stairs to the cellar; but in a second thought, he hurriedly advanced to the table and ensconced himself beneath it, being completely screened by the heavy and thick cover that draped to the floor.

Not a second too soon was his action.

The door opened, and the voice of the Jew was heard addressing some one who accompanied him:

"Yahs—yahs, I was told py Shack Limber dere was a mans come py de back way into t'e house. Ware he can be, you tink?"

"He came in by the cellar?"

"So say Shack Limber."

"I don't believe everything Jack Limber says."

"Why he should say a mans was in t'e house?"

The other who conversed with the Jew, though unseen by the detective, because of the thickness of the table cover, was recognized by him to be Pietro Idello.

Idello now said:

"If it is true, then the man must be after the girl."

"Rachel?"

"Bah! you might as well stop calling her Rachel now—you cannot deceive me as you are trying to."

"Dot was her name."

"I say—bah! You have trained her well; but neither you nor she can make a fool of me."

"But I was not try to make a fool mit you, Electro Pete. T'e girl was Rachel all t'e time—never was anything else, so hellup me—"

"Well, I have my own opinion. And I tell you once for all, if she has not consented to go back to Italy with me as my wife—which she is—before sundown of this day, I shall kill her and float her body in the basin."

"My tear Pietro, you haf t'e privilege of doing as you shall want mit her; she is not my blood—she is a shackass dot she don't take t'e chances she haf to go mit you ant get t'e inheritance of t'e mans Catazky. Of she do dot, I was in mit my share of t'e moneys."

At this point in the conversation, the detective experienced a peculiar sensation.

The voices seemed to be growing fainter and fainter, and the planking beneath him was trembling.

This had been the case for several seconds, but so absorbed was he with what the villains were saying, that he did not at first notice it.

It could hardly be that some passing team on Thames street would cause the building to shake, as far in the rear of the premises as it was.

Something was wrong.

And as he suddenly conceived the idea that he was sinking gradually downward, he felt a reasonable alarm.

Fainter the voices of those from whom he had now learned that the girl had not yet been harmed.

Yes, he was sinking. Where was he going? Table and all, slowly, almost noiselessly—down, down!

Fully realizing his strange peril, he resolved upon a bold move for his life.

He threw up the side of the cloth opposite to where he knew the two were standing, and with revolver in hand started to leap forth.

But he was too late.

He gazed only into darkness.

And at the same time a fiendish laugh came from above.

"Ha, ha, ha! you spy! You thought you could sneak into this house and pry into the secrets of your betters. We knew that you were under the table; you sealed your doom by trying to hide there. Look around you while there is still some light, for you see the trap we have you in—for presently there will be no light. And you may shriek till your lungs burst, without one sound escaping from the pit that is your tomb. I would like to know who you are before you die; but I can forego that, when I know that never again will you see the light of day after we close this hole over you. Ha, ha, ha!"

"How you was, my friend?" mocked the Jew, maliciously, over the edge of the infernal trap.

And the Italian again:

"Others and smarter than you have tried to enter the secret places of the wharf rats of Locust Point; and they—like you now—only fell upon their doom. Good-by, and a pleasant death to you. For you are to die by starvation, do you hear?"

Not an answer did the detective make.

He was availing of the little light that entered at the edge of the trap above, to make a rapid note of his surroundings, and the glances he cast about yielded an alarming discouragement.

The table was rested on an immense screw—the planking under the table, rather—and this screw worked down below the surface of the cellar-like place, out of sight. The position of the table then was as if it simply was set there

on the earthen floor, its springs concealed, its management an unsolvable mystery.

"Good-by, my friend," whined Jacobs, and at the same time another piece of battened planking, which worked on a slide, was drawn over the top of the trap, shutting him in utter darkness. He heard a bolt pushed into its place.

"Well," he muttered, with a long breath, "this is about the worst fix I ever was in. The wharf rats of Locust Point, eh? So there is an organization of some kind so called. A gang of villains, of course. I wonder if there is no possible way to get out of this. I cannot feel that I am to end my life in a hole like this."

He began groping about, and as his hands felt over the solid masonry on all sides, his heart gradually sunk within him, for hopeless indeed did his case seem.

While the foregoing events had been transpiring, Mark Daniels had not been idle.

He sought the room of Timothy Dimble at the hotel.

"Take courage, my friend," he said to the drummer, whom he found in a state bordering on delirium.

"Have you discovered anything?"

"I have seen one of the lost diamonds—"

"You have! And why did you not bring it to me?"

"Slowly, if you please. I have no desire to bring back a single diamond of the lot that were stolen—I want all. And I want the thief as much as I want the gems. I merely thought I would tell you this much to ease your mind a little. I think we shall soon get back your property."

In the office of the hotel Daniels met the proprietor.

"Any progress?" asked the latter, anxiously.

"Yes, a little. By the by, have you noticed that Italian professor around to-day?"

"He has not been out of the hotel, for we sent up his breakfast and several glasses of wine during the morning. Why do you ask about him?—Ah, there he goes this minute."

He nodded toward the entrance, out of which the Italian was just then passing.

"I forgot to ask you what name he is registered under."

"Calis Alfiero."

Here the detective's attention was drawn toward a young man who sat leisurely before the great stove, perusing the daily paper.

Robert Rathwaite.

The detective advanced and politely laid a touch upon his shoulder.

"Ah, how do you do?" Rathwaite immediately exclaimed. "You are one of the gentlemen, who, I understood, were detectives."

"Yes. I would like to have a word with you."

"Certainly, sir. Have you discovered anything about the missing young lady?"

"It is of her I wish to speak. I think you can throw some light upon a matter that is at present a considerable mystery!"

"I?"

"What kind of a game are you up to?" Daniels put, bluntly.

"Game? I don't understand."

"Come, what is the use of beating about. Let me tell you, there is that now in the hands of our Agency which may involve Miss St. Dyer in an ignominious death. There is some great mystery in connection with her; and you must be cognizant of its secret. If you want us detectives to be of service to you and her, you would do well to place us in possession of all the facts."

"My dear sir, I assure you, I haven't the slightest idea what you are driving at," rejoined the young man in a genuine surprise that was a puzzler to the detective.

"Why is Miss St. Dyer hiding, and where is she?"

"Heaven knows, sir, if I could find her at this minute I would be a very happy man. I have had as much as I could do to remain quiet here; but I have confidence in you detectives, and have been curbing my desire to try and find her through my own efforts."

"You saw Miss St. Dyer this morning."

"What in the world—"

"You were with her at Patterson Park."

For a moment Rathwaite appeared to be too completely amazed for speech.

"As God is my judge, I was not!" he exclaimed, after seemingly striving for breath.

"You are willing to swear this?"

"I am. As I told you before, I came on here to meet Miss St. Dyer, who is my promised bride, and we were to be wedded as soon as I arrived. Her disappearance is as much a mystery to me as to you; I have not laid eyes on her for a month or more."

"This is the truth?"

"I swear it."

There could be no doubting Rathwaite's sincerity.

After a few more words, the detective departed.

He was a much perplexed man.

His partner, West, had asserted that he saw Rathwaite in the park that very morning in company with Oriele St. Dyer.

Rathwaite's manner was certainly a truthful

one, as this reader of human nature could plainly perceive.

He muttered musingly:

"There must be two Pietro Idellos—two St. Dyers—two Rathwaites. And yet such a remarkable circumstance is beyond credence."

At the Agency, he found a telegram from a certain bank awaiting the arrival of his senior.

But as it was labeled "important" he unhesitatingly opened it. He surprisedly read this:

"Come at once. The check is here, and we are detaining the utterer of it. It has evidently been tampered with."

CHAPTER XIII.

ON THE SCENT OF RATS.

THE local telegram showed that West, the senior of the firm, was attending to something of a character that demanded instant attention. Frequently one had assumed the business of the other to a judicious extent, such as Daniels was now bent upon.

Some one was being detained by the bank who was "wanted" by West. He would go in his partner's stead.

When he entered the bank—where he was well known—although they had expected to see Mr. West, the teller gave a nod indicating that he should step into the president's room.

And here he met with a surprise indeed.

At his desk sat the president.

On the outer side of the desk stood a young man, and by the side of the latter was a stalwart policeman.

He gazed upon Robert Rathwaite!

Yet it could not be possible, for he had just left that young man in the hotel.

"Ah, Mr. Daniels," saluted the president, suavely, "we have caught your rogue for you. A rogue, I know, for see: there is the check—and it isn't for two hundred either."

And he added, as he handed Daniels a check:

"As we had been advised that the check signed John Castlemon would be for two hundred, we could, upon an extra inspection, see just how it had been raised."

Daniels would not betray that he was ignorant of his partner's little game—for that West was playing some game he knew at once.

"I am glad you have caught him for us. Officer, please take that young man to the central station. I, or Mr. West, will be there shortly to make substantial charges."

This occurrence convinced Daniels that there were indeed two Rathwaites.

And more, having so recently left the genuine Rathwaite, he saw that, though there was a remarkable likeness between the genuine and the culprit taken in charge, yet there was a difference sufficient to distinguish one from the other.

"It was this one," he thought, as he turned again toward the Agency, "that West saw in the park with Oriole St. Dyer. Now, what sort of game is Oriole St. Dyer playing? Hang me if I don't feel a little at sea. I would like to get on the track of Oriole St. Dyer—supposing, of course, that I was mistaken, and the girl at the Jew's junk-shop was not Oriole St. Dyer, but only some one who greatly resembled her."

At the Agency another telegram.

From Chicago.

Opening it, Daniels read:

"Robert Rathwaite all right. A reputable young man. Now in your city. Business, grain merchant. Signed by the Chief of Police of Chicago."

"(— — — — —)."

"When was Mr. West last in here?" he asked of the clerk.

"Hasn't been in since early this morning," was the reply.

The hour was then late in the afternoon.

He went to the central station and explained to the captain that the young man just brought in from the bank was "wanted" by the senior of the firm of West & Co.

"Where can he be all this time?" he questioned himself, and thinking of his partner as the hours grew on apace. "He never stayed away such a length of time before without sending some word to the office to let us know of his whereabouts."

As night approached, Daniels felt an actual anxiety for West. But this must take a second place to a certain plan he had resolved upon as soon as darkness should settle down upon the city.

He was about to leave the Agency to carry out this plan, when Robert Rathwaite entered.

He knew by the telegram that his partner had evidently received in answer to an inquiry sent to the chief of police of Chicago, that Rathwaite was a reputable young man. There could hardly be anything "crooked" about him after the indorsement that had come from Chicago. He received him with perhaps more cordiality than he had evinced toward him previously.

"A word with you, if you please," said the young man.

"What is it?"

"I have seen Oriole St. Dyer."

"Ah!"

"And under rather strange circumstances," added the lover.

"What like?"

"She was at the police station."

"What station?"

"The Central, so I learned from the captain there. I was walking for a breath of fresh air, when my footsteps were accidentally directed toward the station. As I neared it, I saw a female come forth. By the light of the gas lamp in front, I recognized Oriole St. Dyer as she was in the act of drawing a veil over her face."

"You detained her, of course."

"That is just the strangest part of it. I called to her at once. But at the sound of my voice she ran across the street and bounded inside a cab, which drove off furiously."

"She could not have recognized your voice."

"I called her several times—Oriole! Oriole!"

"And did you call out your own name?"

"No."

And he added:

"I have made a wonderful discovery besides."

"Of what nature?"

"There is a man in this city who is the living counterpart of myself."

"How did you find that out?"

"I went into the station to ask what the young lady was doing there. I was informed that she had come to see a prisoner. You can well imagine that my curiosity was aroused. I wanted to see what prisoner my betrothed could have any business with. I was shown a man who, as I tell you, is my exact counterpart. What upon earth can my affianced bride have to do with a criminal, that she should call upon him while behind prison-bars?"

Daniels was thoughtful at this, but said nothing of those thoughts. In his own private opinion, Oriole St. Dyer was not as faithful a betrothed as she might be. Or—and the inward question was reasonable—did she believe that the young man arrested for the matter of the raised check was the true Rathwaite? Had he a sufficient acquaintance with her to keep up the deception?

Complicated it certainly was.

"Since you have lost her," he said, "I do not see that there is anything gained but the fact of the knowledge that she is somewhere in the city. That being an assured thing, you may depend we shall find her for you."

From the Agency he went toward East Baltimore and down to the vicinity of the ferry at Broadway.

His route was past the junk-shop.

The shop was closed.

And fortune seemed to be in his favor just then, for as he neared the premises, he saw a party come from the little door that was cut in the larger and double, stable-like doors of the shop and move rapidly in the direction of the ferry.

His keen eyes detected in the party the form of the Jew, old Jacobs.

He carried in his hand a valise around which was wrapped a paper tied with a string.

"It is the valise that was taken from the room of the drummer," Daniels concluded, as he promptly followed the Jew. "Now then for a sight of these fellows called the wharf rats of Locust Point."

For this occurrence had at once, and by good luck, placed him on the very scent he was intending to follow.

He knew that the Jew was to be among the mysterious wharf rats that very night.

Stealthily the sleuth followed in the wake of the unsuspecting Jew.

Jacobs went to the ferry.

The detective was close, yet not so close as to attract notice by his movements.

Gripping the valise with a strong hand, and casting occasional glances around him, as if fearful of the very thing which was now transpiring—that he might be tracked—the wily Israelite proceeded upward from the ferry at Locust Point and toward the great piers of the elevators.

Fortunately for the detective's object, the night was dark, and he easily kept in the rear of the Jew without being discovered when they had left the immediate vicinity of the few lights that burn on the Point.

Suddenly, Jacobs vanished.

But the detective knew that he had descended by one of the shoots at the coal piers.

Continuing cautiously onward, he presently heard voices below the level of the railroad bed.

"Tey haf met a'retty, you wos say?"

"Yas, ole man, they're among the spiles before this, an' Lectro Pete said as soon as you came, I was to unbitch the last boat an' make tracks for the hole."

"Verry goot; I go directly."

Jacobs entered a small skiff and began rowing away from the coal-strewn wharf.

As he departed over the water, the man whom he had found there waiting with a boat for his accommodation, proceeded to loose the painter of another skiff that was lying close to the timbers of the wharf.

In this operation he was suddenly interrupted.

"Hello, Mr. Boatman," spoke a voice at his

elbow, and with a sharpness that caused him to start.

"Hello yourself," gruffly.

"Is that boat for hire?"

"No, 'tain't."

"Well, I want to hire it anyhow."

"An' you can't do it."

"But I must have it. I need a boat, and that in a hurry. I haven't time to go larking all around the harbor for a boat. I must have this one, and I'll pay you a fair price—"

"You can't have this boat, an' I'm in a hurry an' ain't got no time to talk."

"I'll pay you five dollars for the use of it for an hour, and leave its value in your hand besides—"

"Can't have it, I say."

The skiff containing the Jew was almost beyond the range of vision in the gloom.

As the man uttered the last words something happened that was rather an astonisher.

"I'm going to have that boat!" and as the words entered his surprised ears, he found himself lifted bodily up from the wharf and poised in mid-air.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE WHARF RATS OF LOCUST POINT.

LIKE an indistinctly outlined and large worm, the skiff containing the Jew was receding over the dark surface of the waters, out among the shipping.

Presently it might be entirely lost there or amid the zig-zag wharves.

There was no time to lose if the detective meant to follow Jacobs to the den of the "rats" wherever it might be.

"I am going to have that boat!"

He gripped the man by collar and breechen, and by a motion that displayed a marvelous strength, raised him above his head.

Then, with a half lurch forward, and planting one foot a little in advance to give his own body a springy tendency, he gave the other a mighty swing that hurled him out into the water beyond the wharf.

As the fellow found himself going thus through mid air, he uttered a loud, affrighted yell that echoed against the distant elevators and seemed to tangle among the trellises of the coal dumps with a supernatural sound.

The cry would not fail to bring the watchman to the spot.

But ere that could transpire, Daniels would be out of sight.

He sprang into the skiff, and seizing the single oar it contained, pushed off without waiting to see if the discomfited boatman came up from his bath or not.

In the water, not far from the wharf, the fellow was swimming with the ease of a fish.

Silently he floated there, looking after the skiff; and not another sound escaped him after that terrified shout.

Then, as the skiff drew away, he cautiously swam after it, making no more noise than would some slimy snake who had its native element in the olive-colored waters of the Basin.

Daniels could still see the boat containing the Jew.

Fortunately the latter had been far enough away from the wharf at the time of the encounter to render the occurrence invisible to him because of the tall and dense shadows of the coal-dumps.

Then suddenly the quarry vanished.

But not until the keen-eyed detective had marked his course.

Daniels knew that the Jew had glided under the immense piers of the North German Lloyd and All-n steamships.

Promptly he followed into the labyrinth of spiles there.

A watery labyrinth, where reigned a darkness Cimmerian.

Like the grave it was, with the occasional soft wash of the water on the huge supporting spiles; and cautious indeed must he proceed now, if he would avoid attracting the attention of the man he was trailing.

From spile to spile he gently pushed his boat, guided by the sense of touch alone, and his ears were pricked intently for some sound of the one on whose strange track he was sticking with sleuth like tenacity.

And still further in the rear came the noiseless swimmer who watched the boat containing the detective with flaming and curious orbs.

"A good place for these wharf rats of Locust Point," soliloquized Daniels, as he proceeded tediously. "And I may be on a goose chase after all; for how could they hold any sort of meeting in a place like this? The Jew may have only entered here for a blind.—Ah!"

Far under the pier, in the tangle of spiles and darkness, had he gone when he began to think that nothing was to be found there. But at that instant he made a slight discovery.

Ahead was the faint glimmer of a light.

Very faint, but a light surely.

And not the light itself, but the glimmer it cast brokenly through the forest of spiles.

Redoubling his caution, he pushed on.

Hark!

Off to one side there was a sound like the squeaking of a rat. An unusually large rat it

must have been, to make so loud a noise. Wonderful rats must they be which inhabited the almost impenetrable darkness of that horror-breeding place, for soon, and in another direction came another and similar sound, this last even louder than the first.

A few moments more, and it seemed as if there must be a gigantic rat behind every spile—and the sounds were in motion, he detected, converging toward that point whence came the glimmer of the light.

"Rats," he muttered. "Aha! the wharf rats of Locust Point. I am on the right scent."

Squeak! Squeak! to the left.

Then to the right.

Then in front.

And, hark! was not that another squeak in his rear?

The rats were on every side.

Still onward went the bold detective, determined to follow to the end, come what might.

In the space of a few minutes, he was rewarded by a remarkable sight.

He had reached to almost within the circle of the weird light, and paused quickly as he looked upon a set of phantom forms.

Across the heavy joisted timbers, cross-pieces and girders, were stretched the planks of an improvised floor.

In the center of this floor burned a candle.

Around the edge of the floor could be seen several little single-thwarted skiffs, out from which had stepped and were stepping several beings.

Beside the light, upright and surveying those who were joining him, was the tall form of the man whom Daniels had determined to be the Italian, Pietro Idello, in the disguise he had worn when entering the junk-shop that morning while the detective was in conversation with the Jew.

The Jew was just then moving to a position beside the Italian.

Baltimore is not, unfortunately, provided with a harbor police, like some other cities.

The wharves have their watchmen—faithful ones, too—but an organization like the one which Daniels was now discovering might easily exist and thrive under the very noses of the said watchmen, and there was not the slightest danger of the light from the candle being observed by any one out upon the dark waters, because of the labyrinthine spiles under the great pier, which served well to break and disperse the rays.

The Italian was speaking at the moment Daniels came to his point of observation beyond the glimmering circle of the light.

"Well, Jacobs, you have brought the valise?"

"Yahs, dere he wos," and the Jew held forward and shook the valise which Daniels had seen in the "blind" pawnbroker shop.

"And did you put in it the amount that is to be the share of our brother wharf rats?"

"Yahs, I haf t'e amound. Of you will please open t'e bag ant disburse t'e moneys, t'en we consign t'e tell-tale valises mit a shtone rount it down by t'e water here."

The Italian took the valise, and while opening it, said, to those who were congregated around on the improvised platform:

"Brothers, there has been a diamond robbery committed in the city; the spoils cannot be disposed of safely for a long time to come. But our good brother here, Jacobs, has decided to estimate the value of the gems obtained and make a division of the funds without delay."

"Good! Good for old Jacobs!" broke from several of the rats.

"Yahs, my prot'ers, I haf a hart times to get dot moneys; but I knows you want him, ant I haf t'e greatest regart for my prot'ers of t'e wharf rats by t'e Locust Point."

"There are six of you when our boatman gets in—two of us. Eight in all. Our covenant is to share and share alike in all that is obtained by the members of our organization."

"Yes, yes, that's the bargain," chorused several again.

"Now, there were two magnificent robberies. The first netted diamonds, as I say, and their value Jacobs has computed to be about ten thousand dollars."

A murmur of delight went up from the grim rats.

"Dot wos true, so hellup me—" began Jacobs, as if fearful some one would accuse him of undervaluing the gems.

"The balance of the plunder, in various articles of jewelry, will bring the result up to about fifty thousand."

Another and louder murmur came from the rats.

A haul of fifty thousand dollars among eight was a prize to thrill their thievish hearts.

"Ant I haf make of dot proceeds eight packages—all haf t'e same amound in dem, so hellup me—"

"Here, brothers, are your separate shares. Be careful with it, I enjoin you; let not the wine-cup make you reckless, lest you betray your good fortune to eyes and ears that are at this moment on the alert."

As he distributed the packages of notes among the phantom band, which Jacobs had brought in the valise, the Jew said:

"Yahs, my prot'ers, dere wos eyes ant ears all around. We have caught one of dose eyes ant ears ride into mine house to-day ant we haf him down t'e big hole."

"A man whom I suppose to be a detective," the Italian said, "was caught by Jacobs and myself, hiding under the table in the little reception-room where we have sometimes met, you know."

"Yes, yes, and you flung him down the pit!"

"We did not fling, but let him down so easy that he did not know what was going on until he found himself between four walls of masonry that you know and I know no mortal man can penetrate. There he shall die like a dog, as shall all detectives, or anybody else who may take a notion to pry into our affairs, eh, my brothers?"

"Ay, ay, hurrah for Electro Pete!"

"Hush! Do you want to bring the watchman of the pier under here after us. Now, you had best depart. We will meet on this night one week hence. Between this and then, Jacobs will have been to some one or more cities north to dispose of the rare booty we have, and we cannot meet, you know, unless all can be present. You intend to sack the Norwegian bark inside the Lazaretto to-night, do you not?"

"Yes," answered one of the rats.

"Be off, then, and success attend you."

Back to their skiffs glided the rats noiselessly.

Jacobs followed suit; but the tall form of the Italian remained standing on the platform, as if he wished to see all safely off.

At that instant an incident of a startling nature for the spying detective transpired.

There was a prolonged squeak directly behind him, of a sharpness that was unmistakably a signal.

He saw a dripping figure making forward over one of the cross-pieces of timber toward the platform.

Simultaneously, the candle was extinguished by the Italian, who kicked it into the water.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BELT OF DIAMONDS.

THERE could be but one interpretation to that which had occurred: the eavesdropping detective had been discovered by some one of the wharf rats who was, perhaps, a sentinel put out to guard the proceedings of the villainous band.

The possibility of its being the boatman whom he had hurled into the water never once entered his thought.

Enough had transpired within his hearing to cause a sudden resolve for the capture of the Italian called Electro Pete.

There could be no doubt that he was the bold and ingenious robber who had secured the diamonds in a way so very mysterious. If he was captured, it might be easy to "bag" others of the gang at a future time—especially the Jew—and a matter of State's evidence could probably be worked to procure conviction. The Jew, too, must know where the diamonds were, and Daniels felt confident of being able to frighten him sufficiently to bring about their restoration.

At all events, the capturing of the Italian now became his instant determination.

With this in view, he gave his skiff a hard push forward in the direction of the platform at the very moment the candle was kicked overboard.

And prepared as he was for just such an emergency, hardly a second elapsed ere his dark lantern, ignited by the patent turning wick-raiser, flashed upon the platform, where the Italian was in the act of springing into his own skiff.

Bounding onto the planking, the detective made at him.

Electro Pete wheeled with a half-smothered curse.

The two came together with a shock, the detective letting fall his lantern to grapple with a man who was, he perceived, very powerful.

Darkness again.

Only for an instant.

Then something happened which the detective might have been prepared for and have avoided, if he had but remembered his previous experience with this personage on the Gay street bridge.

As he threw his arms graspingly around the Italian, the latter became on the instant a hideous image of bluish flame!

From neck to waist, at least, he was resolved into a mysterious fire which gave out no perceptible heat, but which was accompanied by a shock, like the shock from an electric battery, so strong that it hurled the detective over backward.

There followed a plash.

Mark Daniels had gone over the edge of the platform and sunk beneath the surface of the black water!

It was certainly an electric shock he had sustained; but this time it was not as severe as that which he had experienced on the bridge.

Though for a second it nearly paralyzed every muscle in his frame, by the time he had sunk in the water he was again in full possession of his senses.

Coming to the surface noiselessly, he clung to

one of the spiles and remained thus, gathering his confused wits.

An unbroken silence prevailed around him. There could be no wharf rats there then—though stop—was not that a scraping sound he heard, not far from him?

Like a boat being pushed rubbingly past a spile.

It at least gave him some idea of the way he must turn to get out of that impenetrable labyrinth.

The water was very cold. But Daniels was a good swimmer, and clinging there long enough to remove his gaiters, which he placed between his teeth, he began making in the direction whence had come the sound of the departing boat.

When he reached the semi-gloom of the harbor and paused for a moment's rest at the brink of the high wharf, there was nothing to indicate the recent presence of the band upon whose stealthy meeting he had spied.

"All right, my bold wharf rats of Locust Point," he muttered, a little out of breath after his tedious swim. "I think I am pretty hot on your trail now. And my rare burglar of diamonds, Electro Pete as you are called—and forsooth as you seem, judging by my two contacts with you—I shall nab you yet, never fear. Ha!"—with a sudden thought—"can it be possible that I have learned why West has not been to the Agency for such an unusual length of time? Is he the one they spoke of as having been cast into a pit of some kind—"

"Hello, there, you?"

He was interrupted by a voice from the wharf above. A form was bending over, looking down at him.

"Help, my friend!" he called promptly.

"Who the devil are ye?"

"Don't stop to catechize, my friend. I have fallen in here, and if you don't lend me a helping hand soon, I'll be a goner."

It was one of the watchmen of the pier.

A friendly rope was soon lowered, and Daniels climbed up to a firm footing with panted breaths of relief.

"What were ye doin' down there, anyhow?"

"Well, I didn't go down for fun, you can bet, old man," returned the disguised detective, with a spice of grim humor. "I was paddling around in the dark like, and the first thing I knew, over I went—"

"But devil a splash did I hear. Come, what were ye doin' there?" interrupted the Irishman, suspiciously.

"Of course you didn't hear any plash, for the Lord knows I didn't fall in right here, but somewhere nigh the elevators, and I've been swimming round like a sick fish hunting for a place to get out. 'Sh! don't give it away, but I'm afraid I was a little—you know. Take something?"

Having drawn on his gaiters, the detective produced a small flask and extended it to the watchman.

"It's ag'inst the rules—"

"Pshaw, old man! why, you've saved my life. You needn't be afraid. Come, I want a drink myself, and I like company."

"It's too much company ye've had to-night already, I'm thinkin'," opined the Irishman, as he received the bottle, nevertheless, and cast a searching glance about as he slyly removed the cork.

"Do ye live round here?" he asked, after smacking his lips over the long pull he took.

"No, I belong in the city. But don't give it away. I'm all wet, and I guess the best thing I can do is to hurry home. I'm sober enough now, you can bet."

"Good-luck to ye, an' be careful as ye go through the 'frog pond,'* for there's a lot o' cars an' engines busy there this night, an' if ye're heel takes a twist in the rails, ye'll be a goner yet, d'ye mind?"

"Thanks, I'll be careful."

Recrossing the ferry, Daniels, filled with apprehension for the safety of his partner, after hearing what he did in the haunt of the wharf rats, proceeded straightway toward the junk-shop of the Jew.

To enter and explore the premises he was fully resolved.

And this was soon discovered to be no easy task.

He succeeded at last in entering the yard at the rear and at the side of the somber dwelling, by climbing the fence.

Then he found the same cellar door through which West had passed to fall into the cunning trap which the house contained.

"I would do a wise thing," he ruminated, "if I changed these wet clothes for dry ones; but I've no time for that with the chances that West is in a bad pickle here somewhere."

The hour was now quite late; a dead silence reigned in the yard at the back of the junk-shop.

Carefully raising the cellar door, Daniels descended.

* The "frog pond" at Locust Point is a well-known trap for the unwary, because of the multitude of railroad tracks crossing one another by the coal piers, where the "frogs" in the angles of the tracks have frequently caught the boot of a man, in some cases resulting in death to the unfortunate.

His recent ducking had ruined the fuses he usually carried loose in his vest pocket for instant use.

In the darkness in which he found himself at the foot of the joisted steps, therefore, he proceeded with utmost caution lest he plunge down some unseen hole.

Groping thus, he found the steps which he knew led upward into the house.

Then up the steps he went; presently he reached and passed the door of the same room West had entered.

The blackness of pitch was beyond.

But he saw what appeared to be a minute speck of light at an elevation about breast high, and advancing to this discovered it to be a small hole in another door.

It was through this hole that the evil eye had watched him when he was in the shop of the Jew, and when he made the discovery of the the valise that had been stolen from the drummer.

And as he applied his eye to the tiny aperture, he saw on the other side the form of Jacobs bending over a spot in the floor, from which he was just then extracting—

A small, velvet, belt-like package.

A thrill passed over the sleuth.

For at that moment he saw the identical belt of diamonds described by Dimble as having been stolen from him!

The Jew was secreting the precious parcel busily about his person, when a startling voice interrupted the proceeding.

"Hold on, old man! What's that you have there?"

With a gasp, the Jew turned.

A look of white fear came into his visage as he found himself covered by a revolver, and behind the weapon a pair of eyes that contained an unmistakable sternness it would be folly to disregard.

"Py gracious!"

"I'll take that little velvet belt, if you please."

"Dere was not'ing in dot belt—no, no," Jacobs cried, with wide orbs, as he remained on his knees regarding this unexpected intruder.

"I'll take that belt," repeated the detective, more sternly.

Jacobs groaned out dismally:

"You was a ropper! You haf come to rob a poor old mans—"

"Fling that thing over here, or I'll blow the whole top of your head off!"

Jacobs fairly jabbered in a combined fear and rage at this prospect of losing the equivalent for ten thousand dollars which he had that very night put up for division among the wharf rats.

But he glanced covertly at the gleaming barrel of the revolver and into the face of the man who was, he thought, some mere robber. Then, with a curse in Hebrew, he flung the valuable receptacle toward the detective's feet.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

THE detective stooped and picked up the belt.

Feeling it carefully, he became convinced that the precious stones were within it.

Stowing it away in a pocket, he said:

"Now, old man, I want a word with you."

"W'ot more you was want? You haf rob me enough—"

"Oh, no! I haven't robbed you; I have only secured, luckily, the diamonds that were stolen from the gentleman at the Mansion House. Now, I am after the balance of the plunder that was gotten there. And I want you to tell me how it was so adroitly obtained, and exactly who it was that obtained it; then you will go with me as a witness, and if you don't give the whole thing away clean, I have here enough evidence to send you to prison for a pretty good term—"

"You was a detective!" broke in the astounded Jew, with dilated eyes.

"Right this time. Come, what will it be?—will you make a clean breast of it, or will you go up for a spell?"

While the Jew stared and hesitated—perhaps debating whether it would not be better for him to make the confession desired—something occurred to alter the whole aspect of the scene in that little shop.

Still keeping Jacobs covered by the revolver, Mark Daniels was suddenly thrilled to his heart's core by a most piercing shriek that seemed to come from a distance and in the direction of the room at the back of the counter, where he had so nearly lost his life at the hands of the Jew and Electro Pete.

The sound reminded him at once of the peril of the girl who so strangely resembled Oriole St. Dyer—if it was not indeed she—because of the terrible threat he had heard Electro Pete utter.

For the moment forgetting Jacobs in his manly desire to succor a female in extreme peril, he sprang toward the rear of the counter and dashed around it, into the side room.

Here a light was burning. The apartment was empty.

But he remembered the room on the second floor, whence had come the voices of a former scene that was so full of peril to the girl.

Up the stairs he bounded.

At the head of the flight he found the door of the apartment open and a light burning within.

But on the threshold he paused.

A horrifying sight greeted him.

In the center of the floor lay the body of the girl, on her side, in a contorted position, with the beautiful face strained up on a twisted neck. On her pure brow was an ugly wound, and from the wound the blood was oozing and staining the carpet under the head of wildly opulent hair.

"The wretches have murdered her after all!" burst from him in a horrified way.

Amid the hair was the plain gold band, with its single setting of a magnificent diamond.

He nerved himself to advance and remove this, with the sudden thought that it might prove of future service to him on the strange trail he was following.

And as he stooped, he could not avoid another and closer glance at the lovely, disfigured features, which told him that she must surely be dead.

What his next move might have been, it is impossible to say, but another startling item happened just then to shape his course of action.

At the instant he placed the gold tiara in his pocket, he heard below the report of a pistol.

This was followed by the louder and sharper report of a revolver.

A man of considerable celerity of thought and movement was Mark Daniels. Instantly the thought entered his brain that it might portend something in connection with his suspicion that his partner, West, was in danger in that house.

In a trice he had slipped off his wet gaiters, and taking them in one hand, in the other he grasped his own trusty revolver and hastened swift and noiselessly down the stairs.

Just as he reached the bottom of the flight, there was another report, and following the report a defiant voice that cried:

"You coward! I am armed, too, as you will find. Come in sight again, and I think you will get your full of bullets."

"Curse you, you prowling detective! I shall not wait to see you starve to death down there. I shall kill you before I leave this city, and I am going to-night."

"Will you? Come, then, try it on. Show so much as a lock of your hair above that trap, and I can cut it off, and maybe send the bullet a little lower into your scoundrelly brain."

"Listen," snarled Electro Pete. "I am going to put out the light. Then I shall fire my weapon down upon you from different sides, and you cannot see whence come the shots quickly enough to return the fire. Some of my shots will surely take effect. Oh, I shall kill you!"

It was a singular sight that greeted Daniels as he came noiselessly behind the counter and reached the door of the room in the rear of the shop.

On a bracket at one side was a light.

Over a great hole in the center of the floor stood the Italian, with a smoking weapon in his hand—though the villain was back far enough to be out of range of the weapon of the man who was evidently down in the hole.

And the veins of our detective tingled as he recognized the voice of his partner coming from the black depths.

The Italian's back was toward him.

As Electro Pete uttered the last words, he stepped toward the lamp on the bracket as if to carry out his plan of throwing the room into complete darkness.

"Let up, old man!" sounded a voice in the rear of the Italian.

He wheeled to find himself covered by the revolver of the man whom he remembered as the one who had penetrated to the haunt of the rats at Locust Point.

And West, down in the hole, recognized that voice, for instantly a glad shout burst from him.

"Down with the rogue, Mark! Wing him if you can, and make him a prisoner! Let him have it!"

Even while these words were arising from the trap, Electro Pete gave another exhibition of his wonderful personality.

His arm performed a circular, wheel-like motion so quick that the human eye could not follow it.

The revolver he held shot forward as if hurled from a catapult, and striking the weapon of the detective knocked it out of his hand, firmly though he was grasping it.

Accompanying this, the Italian leaped to the wall, and by a lightning movement shattered the lamp.

West, down in his predicament, was not idle as he heard the sound that told of excitement above.

He had a fuse lighted, and the glimmer from it showed the location of the trap—showed too that Electro Pete had disappeared.

There must have been some secret egress

from the room, for the Italian had not passed the detective who stood directly in front of the door.

Daniels advanced to the trap, wary for a shot from some ambush where the Italian might be lurking.

"West?" he called.

"Daniels, God bless you, old partner! Can it possibly be that you have lighted on my unfortunate trail?"

"I guess it's me. But we'll have the questions afterward. How am I going to get you out?"

By a trial, they discovered that Daniels could not reach down far enough to grasp his partner's hand without losing his own balance, though West stood on the table on tip-toe.

Then the ready expedient of the detective showed itself.

"Make room there," he called.

"What are you up to?"

"No matter; make room. And be prepared to act quickly, or that fellow may get both of us down in the hole."

"Ah!" as the other's intention dawned upon him.

The next moment Daniels had dropped from the edge of the trap down upon the table.

As if it had been a practiced trick, West immediately clambered onto the shoulders of the other, and standing there, he could reach the planking.

On this his hands closed in a gripe of iron.

"Ready?" asked Daniels, guardedly.

"Ready—go it!" was the response.

Then up the dangling form of West clambered Daniels, and presently stood safe on the floor of the room.

To reach and draw up his partner was now an easy matter.

The two detectives stood for a moment looking at one another.

"Much obliged," said West.

"Oh, that's all right. I happened to hear something about a man in a hole at the house of the Jew, and that was exactly what brought me here—suspicion that it might be yourself."

"What have you been doing?" inquired West, turning to business at once.

"I have spotted the gang known as the Wharf Rats of Locust Point. I have recovered the diamonds—"

"The diamonds?"

"Correct. They are in my pocket at this moment. And I think I would have got the whole of the plunder if it had not been for something murderous that has transpired within this house since I entered it."

"Murderous! What like?"

"Come, and I will show you."

He led the way to the room up-stairs.

The two were acting as if they had not the slightest fear of an attack from Electro Pete or any of his villainous band; but their eyes nevertheless were about them constantly, and badly indeed would have fared any one or more had they dared to attack the two redoubtable detectives who were now working hand in hand.

A brace to be feared were they.

Straight to the room on the second floor Daniels led his companion.

The light still burned there.

But at the threshold a surprise was presented.

The girl had disappeared.

"What was it you had to show me?" interrogated West, as he noted the blank look in the other's face.

"A murdered girl."

"Who?"

"She who is so mysteriously like Oriole St. Dyer. She was here a few minutes ago, and dead, I could almost swear. I took this from her head."

He showed the gold band with the setting of the diamond.

CHAPTER XVII.

WORD FROM A MISSING GIRL.

THE girl, Rachel, had most mysteriously vanished.

Daniels explained the circumstance of his finding her, and the scene with the Jew preceding it.

He also informed West of what he had stumbled upon at the pier of Locust Point.

They turned at once to an exploration of the premises.

The search was thorough, and it revealed that the Jew, as well as the girl, had deserted the dwelling.

"We'll have that Jew, though," said West.

"Where have you been for so long a time?" inquired Daniels, as they searched about among the effects of Jacobs with the skill and pertinacity of very burglars.

"Down that hole you found me in," and West proceeded to give an account of what had transpired since he left his partner to pursue the "bunko" affair.

"There were two telegrams at the Agency for you to-day."

"Ah?"

"One from the —th National Bank. A young man was caught there with a raised check, and the President had him in his room

waiting for you. I took the responsibility of acting in the premises to the extent of having him put in the central station to await substantial charges from you."

"That was right. A raised check, you say?"

"Yes."

"Then we have young Rathwaite down fine, I am thinking—"

"Oh, no, you haven't."

"What do you mean?"

"At the time the check-raiser was caught, I was talking with Robert Rathwaite in the office of his hotel."

"No?"

"But—yes."

The search which the two were conducting at last revealed the remarkable fact that although there was evidence of the Jew having carried on a steady business in the dwelling, there was at that moment nothing but actual rubbish in the collection of things around.

No further clew to the lost property of the New York drummer.

Both would have liked to devote more time then to the place, but after an overhauling of the house in that part where the shop was located, they departed.

"And there was another telegram," said Daniels, as the two sleuths pursued their way along Thames street.

"From where—whom?"

"Chief of Police of Chicago."

"Good. What had he to say?"

"Rathwaite is all right."

"A clean indorsement?"

"Yes."

"See here"—suddenly. "Don't let Dimble know what you have accomplished toward the recovery of his property."

"Oh, no."

And Daniels asked, as they hailed a cab and entered it:

"Where are you going?"

"To the central station."

"To see the young sharper?"

"Yes. And you?"

Daniels consulted his watch. It was then after twelve o'clock.

I shall take a turn up by the Mansion House."

"But this Jew?"

"He can't leave town."

"What have you done?"

"I have every depot watched."

"And he is described so that there will be no missing him?"

"Yes."

At a corner up-town they separated—West to interview the young sharper he had caught at his game of the raised check, and Daniels to go to the Mansion House.

Notwithstanding the midnight hour, Daniels found a message awaiting him at the office of the hotel.

"Mr. Rathwaite left word, sir, that if you came here, he wished to see you, no matter what time it was. Will you step up to his room?"

"Yes," replied the detective, and getting the number, he ascended the stairs.

The young man had not retired; he was waiting, apparently with the belief that the detective would come.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, as Daniels entered, after rapping. "I am very glad to see you, Mr. Daniels. I have something singular to communicate."

"Go ahead," rejoined the sleuth, appropriating a chair.

"I have heard from Oriele St. Dyer."

"You have? In what shape?"

"A note. Read that," and as he spoke, he extended a small billet for the other's perusal.

Opening the missive, Daniels was a little surprised at reading the following:

"DEAR ROBERT:—I know that you are in the city for a fulfillment of the contract between us by which I am to become your wife. But at present it cannot be consummated. I long ago told you that there was a great secret in my life, and that I was ever on the lookout for something that would lead to a solution of it. Since my arrival in Baltimore, I have gained a clew to what I wish, and am now following it. I have not—never will—waver in my love for you, and if you are patient, all will be as you wish. At present I am a Nemesis! When my task is finished, I will return to you. Until then, *au revoir*, and believe me faithfully yours, ORIELE."

"What do you think of it?" the young man asked.

Daniels remembered the words of the girl on the Gay street bridge when in conversation with the Italian.

He knew that she had a secret in her past life of some kind which she was anxious to solve as she would a riddle, and a note that had been cast over the transom of her room had brought her alone to meet the man who seemed to have a multiplicity of names: Electro Pete, Pietro Idello, Calis Alfiero.

"I know enough, young man," he said, "to be able to say that the lady has a secret."

"I know that too. But I never could persuade her to tell me of what it consisted. Have you any idea what it is?"

"No."

Changing the subject abruptly, Daniels asked: "Did you ever see this?"

Producing at the same time the tiara he had taken from the brow of the girl he had believed to be murdered when he saw her in that upper room of the Jew's residence.

At once Rathwaite exclaimed:

"I have seen it a score of times."

"Where?"

"Worn by my betrothed, Miss St. Dyer."

"You are quite sure?"

"Indeed, I am ready to swear it."

"Why are you so confident that you could swear to it?"

"I will show you."

He took the golden band from the detective's hand and inverted it, exposing the inner side.

"Look," he said, pointing.

Following the direction of the finger, Daniels saw on the band near that portion where the single and brilliant diamond was set, an engraving in small letters that read:

"Mizpah."

Glancing up inquiringly, Rathwaite answered his look by saying:

"That tiara was a present from me to her. I had the word engraved there when I purchased it. There is a little romance connected with the diamond, too. Let me relate it briefly. I was once a very poor young fellow. I was at one time a clerk in a hotel in Chicago. A prominent actress was a guest of the hotel, and she had taken a fancy to me—whether for my good looks"—jocularly—"or for the attention I paid to her, I cannot assert. She went so far as to express an actual affection for me. I was at the time dreaming of possessing the beautiful girl whom you have seen—Miss St. Dyer; and when I found that the actress was really in love with me, I told her plainly that my heart was elsewhere, and told her to whom it was given: the orphan heiress, Miss St. Dyer, who was also at the hotel. This actress was at least a very sensible woman, and she wished me all possible happiness in a way that was sincere, as you may judge. She was taken with a fever, and sending for me, she placed that diamond in my hand, saying that she wished it to be a bridal present from me to the girl I loved. Shortly afterward she died. I did not wait to make a bridal present of it, but had it set in that gold band and gave it to Miss St. Dyer. It was soon after that, I came into a snug inheritance, embarked in the grain business, and, asking Miss St. Dyer to be my wife, she accepted. She left Chicago some time ago, with the understanding that we would meet in the city of Baltimore at this date and be wedded."

"Do you know who were Miss St. Dyer's parents?" Daniels queried, as the young man paused.

"I do not. But I have an idea that they must have been Italians or of Italian descent."

"Did you ever hear of the name of Catatzky?"

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, merely for a point in a trail I am following, and which at present has no interest for you. What will you do about this note which you have received from Miss St. Dyer?"

"Continue to have faith in the woman I love before all others. I am sure she is true to me and will give me her hand and heart together as soon as she can finish the secret business which seems to be engrossing her."

"A very sensible conclusion. And now I will bid you good-night," said Daniels, arising and taking his departure.

As he passed from the young man's room he failed to perceive a tall and sinuous form that had glided swiftly away from the door and around the angle of the corridor.

The form of the Italian professor of music, Calis Alfiero.

He watched the departing detective with glittering eyes, and from his lips came an almost inaudible mutter, like this:

"So—o! the young lady has struck something which she thinks will solve a riddle of her life, eh? And she is following it. Good! I too have struck something which I am following. And I will have my revenge, mark that! The vendetta shall be fulfilled—but not until I have the chance to say in the ear of the beautiful demon: Behold! I have followed a long trail, but I have reached the end at last, and the end is your death. Your death—you who call yourself Oriele St. Dyer!"

At the Agency Daniels found his senior.

"Come back here," said West, indicating the rear room. "I have something strange to tell you."

And Daniels knew by his tone that his visit to the central station had yielded an important item in regard to the rather complicated case they both were working.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A STRANGE VISIT FROM ORIELE ST. DYER.

"I HAVE seen the fellow who looks so much like Rathwaite," were the first words of the senior.

And as Daniels waited to hear what it was the other had to communicate, he added:

"The young man tells a strange story."

"About his bunko business?"

"How did you know that there was any bunko about it?"

"A mere guess, since you are not in the habit of giving people checks to be raised."

"Well, I did allow myself to be taken in, for an object. But it is not altogether of that he had to relate. He has given me a half-clew to a most villainous plot, having in view the destruction of a young and beautiful girl."

"Ah! Oriele St. Dyer, perhaps."

"Precisely."

"What was his little story?" Daniels inquired.

"It seems that his name is Andrew Arnold. He is not in the slightest related to our young man at the hotel. Andy Arnold is one of those whom misfortune would have sent to the poorhouse if he had not been possessed of a stubborn vim. He resolved that the world should give him a livelihood. In Chicago he met with one of a gang that had its head-quarters in this city; this one was then there disposing of some jewelry plunder. The two became intimates. Arnold was the possessor of various talents, which the Baltimore rogue was not slow to discover; he offered Arnold capital to steer that little game we saw him at on the curbstone of Thames street.

"But this Baltimorean had another object in view when he made up to the young man. He informed him that if he wished, he could make a fortune by aiding in a little plot to destroy a female who might attain colossal wealth if she but had the nerve to cross the ocean to claim it—and she alone stood between him (the man who gave this information) and that wealth. Arnold cared little for the world or anybody in it, and expressed a readiness to enter the plot, whatever it was. Then it was unfolded to him in part: he greatly resembled a young man to whom the young lady was betrothed. The young lady was about starting for the city of Baltimore. He must go there and personate the lover if he could successfully, and lead the young lady by some means into the den of the Jew on Thames street. This was to be all of his task; he need not trouble himself as to what became of her afterward, and in a short time he would receive several thousand dollars.

"During the trip to Baltimore—which was in the very next train after that which was conveying the girl—the plan was discussed at length, and the party exhibited a letter in the hand of the young Chicago lover, asking if he thought he could imitate the chirography. Arnold was talented for just such trickery, and announced that he could easily prepare a note in the handwriting so like the letter shown that he would defy any one to detect the fraud.

"It appears that by some means the party who was leading Arnold on in the plot knew that Oriele St. Dyer had something in her past life which she had for years been trying to solve herself; it was a mystery to her. She was only a few days in Baltimore when she received a note saying that if she would come alone, and without the knowledge of anybody, to the house of a fortune-teller, No. —, North Calvert street, she would there find out all she wished to know in regard to the secret of her life.

"Now, considering that Oriele St. Dyer is no ordinary girl, it is not likely that she would have paid any attention to the communication; but it was, as she thought, in the handwriting of the man who was her betrothed, and moreover, it had his well-known signature attached. Believing that her lover had, perhaps by some accident stumbled upon what she wished to discover, she obeyed the request, and met at the house one whom she was singularly deceived into believing was indeed Robert Rathwaite—"

"Ah!" aspirated Daniels.

"A fortune-teller was ready for the occasion; but of course she went widely astray in the rigmorle she told the young girl. Arnold, however, had a story of encouragement prepared, and it was agreed that she should abide there, as a boarder, until he could follow another clew which he believed related to a secret in her life. And I say again, considering that she is no ordinary girl, it is a wonder to me that she did not penetrate the deception that was being practiced. No matter. She received a note from her supposed lover on the following day, saying that if she would meet him at Patterson Park, he might be able to tell her something additional of interest to her. She fulfilled the appointment, and thus you see, I was deceived into believing that I had seen her in company with Rathwaite. On this occasion, he tried to persuade her to go with him to the dwelling on Thames street. This she agreed to do, but not at once. To-day she would have gone—for it is now toward morning," said West, looking at his watch.

"And I happen to know that she visited this fellow at the central station after his arrest," said Daniels, who narrated his brief interview with Rathwaite before starting out on his scent after the wharf rats.

"Well, here the story ends, for he is jailed, and Oriele St. Dyer is not now at the house on North Calvert street, for I have been there to inquire."

The night clerk of the Agency at this juncture knocked upon the door of the rear office, and

entering to the response of West, made the strange announcement:

"There is a lady outside to see one of you gentlemen. Shall I tell her to come in?"

"Yes," answered West, in an astonishment that was shared by his partner.

A woman clad in black and closely veiled entered rapidly.

They arose.

"Can I have a few words with you?" she asked, and they could see a pair of singularly brilliant eyes glancing first at one then at the other from behind the veil that screened the face.

"Certainly; be seated," returned West, placing a chair.

As she sat down she threw up the veil.

The surprise of the two was increased hugely as they saw revealed the face of Oriole St. Dyer.

"It is a rather unseemly hour for a woman to call upon a matter of business," she proceeded to speak, in quick accents, "but that which I have to say will not admit of delay."

"What is it?" West put, politely.

"My life is in danger!"

"Indeed!" from both.

"Let me explain, if you have time to listen."

"Proceed."

"As you are aware, my name is Oriole St. Dyer. I once lived in Chicago, and it was believed that I was a rich heiress. Instead, I have merely derived a tolerable income by contributing to the magazines. One night in the streets of Chicago I was abruptly accosted by a very beautiful girl who begged me, as I hoped for mercy from my God, to do her a service. She was in tatters, and presented a forlorn picture. She said her name was Anice Idello, and that she was, unfortunately, a married woman; her name before marriage being Catazky."

The two detectives exchanged glances, but in such a sly manner that the speaker did not notice it.

"I was then living at a private boarding-house, and thinking that it was no more than shelter and alms that this poor being wanted, I took her to my home and was about to prepare some nourishment for her, when she stopped me, saying that it was not such service she required. She then began to tell me a very strange story. She was an Italian by birth, and her family had been one of considerable wealth; her education had been of the most vigorous kind, hence the aptness with which she spoke the English language. She had fallen in love with a servant in her father's house and in an ill-starred moment wedded with him secretly. For this she was disowned. But she cared little for that at the time, so great was her love for the man who had won her heart. She immediately sought him, and they fled. After living for a long time on her jewels, which were pawned to raise funds, her husband, in a drunken fit—and probably after he had grown tired of her—made the boast that they had no need to be running about the continent in that way, as she was her father's heiress—her father was dead—and they might as well return to enjoy what was theirs. She asked him how he knew that her father was dead, and he informed her that he—her husband—had killed him before their departure."

"By other remarks that the drunken brute made, she learned that he had actually murdered her father. This, and the proposition that they should return to Italy to enjoy the money gained by blood, had filled her with such horror, that she fled from him. He pursued her, and at times, when he was lucky enough to catch up with her, he made such threats that at last she began to fear for her life. Her husband's name was Pietro Idello. He was then in Chicago. He was seeking her life. And then she made a proposition to me which I tell you plainly, was startling. If I would assume her identity for a week—long enough for her to leave the city in a disguise—she would give me one thousand dollars. This seemed a little ridiculous at first, in the supposition that I could do such a thing. But she took me by the arm and led me to the mirror in my room, where she showed me my face beside hers; and I must say, the resemblance we bore one another was remarkable. It would not be so difficult a matter for me to assume her character, as far as likeness was concerned."

"Only for a week, she had said. A thousand dollars made in a week was not to be despised. Besides, I could easily—so I thought—at the expiration of that time, take steps to reveal the deception if I chose. I agreed to do as she wished. I then received from her instructions that showed me she had seen me often before and that what she was now doing was a well-laid plan for her future safety—though I honestly believe she did not mean that I should be menaced in the way I have since as a consequence of my folly. By following out her directions in regard to certain exposure of my face at times, I found ere long, that I was being shadowed by a tall man of Italian aspect. Like a nightmare he clung to me—clung to my path, I mean. Once, he succeeded in meeting me alone, and he threatened my life if I re-

fused to return to Italy with him to inherit the wealth of the deceased Pedro Catazky. So persistent and dangerous was he becoming, that I was at last forced to start upon a blind hunt for the girl who had gotten me into such a predicament through my charitable feelings; for no matter how I vowed to this Italian that I was not Anice Idello, he would not believe me, nor all the proofs which I offered to produce. I was then a hunted woman for another woman's troubles, and nothing I could do would throw the Italian off my track. I then began the search for the woman who was the cause of my dilemma."

CHAPTER XIX.

A PEEP THROUGH A KEYHOLE.

WITH but a momentary pause, Oriole St. Dyer continued:

"My search for this party—Anice Idello—has led me to the city of Baltimore. And now I will tell you something which I withheld on that first visit of yours—to Daniels—to my room at the hotel. The personage of seeming unearthliness, who turned himself into a column of flame in my bedroom, I recognized to be this same Italian. It was then because I feared so much for my life, that I at last sent for the proprietor with the resolve that I would place the authorities between myself and the one I feared. While matters stood thus, I received a letter from a party in this city. It was in the handwriting of a man to whom I was betrothed—Robert Rathwaite is his name. I had acquainted Mr. Rathwaite with the fact that I was searching for some one in the world somewhere, and until I found the one I was looking for, my life would be a constant misery. This note of which I speak, coming from him as I supposed, promised to take me to a person who could reveal what I desired. I eagerly did as the note requested. And I did more. Thinking to throw my Italian persecutor off my track, I disordered the bed-clothing in my room, and set—barring a superb arm to the gaze of the two detectives—"I let the blood flow from here on the linen of the bed, to give an appearance of murder as well as disappearance."

On the arm of exquisite contour which she displayed, they saw a scar from a puncture over one of the pale blue veins.

"My mind was made up to adopt every means in my power of invention to escape the Italian. I went to a house which the note indicated, expecting to meet Robert Rathwaite. I found there a man whom I at once saw was not my betrothed, but who greatly resembled him. By the remarks he made, I conceived the notion—perhaps erroneous—that if he knew what I was looking for, I might, by permitting him to believe that I was deceived, get on the track of the woman. I had made an engagement with him to visit a certain house on Thames street in this city to-morrow—to-day, I should say, as it is now near morning. But something has happened to cause this party who is playing the part of my accepted lover, to be arrested. I learned of the fact through a late edition of the News, and in that same edition I saw of the arrival of Robert Rathwaite at the Mansion House. I sent a note to Mr. Rathwaite; I called at the station, because I wished this villain who is perpetrating the fraud for some deep purpose, to believe that I still thought him to be Mr. Rathwaite. Now, I will state the main object of my visit to you."

And without pausing even for a fresh breath, Oriole St. Dyer pursued:

"If it is at all possible, I would like the young man at the station to be released."

A moment's silence prevailed upon this singular remark.

"Why do you wish him released?" inquired the senior detective, keenly.

"Because I wish to keep that engagement with him, and I want one of your bureau of detectives to shadow us, to serve me if I am imperiled."

"What do you expect to accomplish?"

"I believe that when I shall accompany him, I will find that the girl I befriended in Chicago, at such a fearful cost to my own future peace of mind, is even in the plot to keep up the deception that I am indeed Anice Idello."

"Does not this belong to you?" asked Daniels, producing the gold band set with the diamond.

Immediately she exclaimed:

"Yes! It was stolen from me by this man who is assuming the character of Robert Rathwaite."

"How do you know that he stole it?"

"I was aware of the theft at the time, but said nothing. My mind was on a deeper subject than a mere bauble then."

"Why do you have this notion that by following the fraud who calls himself Rathwaite, you will find something of the girl?"

"I cannot explain my feeling exactly. But I believe that this man is in league with the girl to lead me into a trap where I may perhaps be murdered, and when the Italian shall be sure of my death, he will not think of the real Anice Idello who will then be living in peace."

After a pause she asked:

"Can this be managed in the way I suggest?"

"Miss St. Dyer," said West, slowly; "I think I know the house on Thames street where this young man wished to lead you. I may say that if he knew as much as I now know concerning that house, he would not take you there."

"What is there about the house?"

"It is a den of thieves."

"I suspected as much."

"Two of those thieves are spotted and would find it a difficult matter to escape from the city through the cordon of our agents. The house is under surveillance. But tell me; you say this girl whom you agreed to personate was a good likeness of yourself?"

"We were images one of the other."

"Mr. Daniels, tell this young lady what you can about the counterpart you have seen at the house on Thames street."

"Ah!" eagerly. "You saw a counterpart of me at the house?"

"Yes, and she wore that tiara with the diamond."

"It is, then, as I supposed. I was to be led into a trap and murdered as the real Anice Idello—"

"Pardon me," Daniels interrupted, "I do not think so," and he proceeded to relate the mystery of the girl at the Jew's dwelling, concluding with the climax of her probable murder and disappearance.

"It is certainly a marvel," said Oriole, musingly. "If those whom you speak of were acting toward her as if they knew her to be Anice Idello, why does the Italian continue to haunt me as he does?"

"Miss St. Dyer," West said, "I wish to ask that you continue in your place of hiding, wherever it is, while we are busy with a strange trail that has come to us within the past few days."

"I will do as you desire."

As she arose, seeming to relinquish entirely her first intentions when she had heard what Daniels had to say, he added:

"But I would like to have your address."

She handed him a card, after writing on it a line.

"And a question, please, before you go."

"What is it?"

"Is St. Dyer your real name?"

"It is."

"You never bore any other?"

"Never."

"You will swear to this?"

"Cheerfully."

"That will do—thank you."

When she had gone, the two sat and gazed at one another.

"What is your opinion, Daniels?"

"You may be sure I have formed one."

"I would like to hear whether it agrees with mine."

"I believe the man we know as Electro Pete is the Pietro Idello whom this girl fears; the man who came here to put us on her trail as a criminal wanted by the Italian authorities, is not Pietro Idello, though he announced himself as such."

"But what about this column of fire business? The man who gained an entrance to her room at the hotel on several occasions, by a means no one can find out—and the man you encountered at separate times on the Gay street bridge and at Locust Point—seem to possess that wonderful ability of resolving themselves into flame; it is not likely that it is an accomplishment so common that two persons would be playing it."

At this juncture the clerk entered again:

"The captain of the north-eastern station is calling, sir."

West hastened to the telephone box.

"Hello!" came the call from afar.

"Well?"

"Detective Agency of West & Co?"

"Yes."

"There's been a man brought in who was taken on the Bel Air road hastening out of town and acting in a suspicious manner. A search here disclosed that he was loaded with jewelry of various descriptions. He is a Jew. Do you want to see him? We shall hold him anyhow, because of the goods found on his person."

"I'll come at once," replied West.

With a few words to Daniels, he departed for the north-eastern station. He felt sure that the man being held because of the apparent plunder he carried, was no other than the Jew of the Thames street junk-shop.

Perhaps the jewelry he was making off with was some of the very jewelry stolen from Dimble. This would soon be settled, as he had received a duplicate description from Daniels.

Mark Daniels, now that West was on the Thames street lay, determined to take up the trail of the Italian who had represented himself as Pietro Idello, the husband of the fugitive Anice—for in this party, he suspected was the wonderful thief, whoever he might be.

Sleepless as the sleuth he was called, he returned to the hotel and after a word or two with the night clerk there received the key to the room engaged by his partner, and which it will be remembered, was adjoining that occupied by the supposed professor of music.

In answer to an inquiry, he ascertained that

the professor was then in his bedroom—had retired several hours before midnight.

It was then almost dawn.

In the corridor above, Daniels removed his shoes.

Stealthily as a cat, he advanced to the room and entered without the slightest noise.

When the door was closed, he stood for a second in the darkness listening, and his glance was toward that part of the room where he knew the communicating but locked door to be.

On tip toe he crept to the door, and stooping, placed his eye to the keyhole.

Though bent upon a spying purpose he was rather unprepared for what greeted him at that moment.

As if fortune had especially guided him there at the minute, he was, in that one transient breath, in possession of the whole secret of the ease with which the room of the drummer had been robbed:

This; and now all doubt as to who the robber was, was gone.

The man who called himself Pietro Idello was that robber.

Plainly before the gaze of the detective was the means by which the theft had been perpetrated.

In that stillly hour another attempt was in progress to extract from the room of the slumbering Dimble the remnants, perhaps, of the jewelry the detective had procured to use as a bait.

CHAPTER XX.

A JEW IN LIMBO.

WEST, the detective, was right in his surmise.

The man captured and held at the north-eastern station was the Jew of the den on Thames street.

When he arrived at the station the captain was evidently awaiting him, and he greeted him with:

"Ah, Mr. West, since telephoning you, we have made an inventory of the jewelry found on the prisoner. And what do you think?"

"Well?" said West, who partly anticipated the result.

"We have struck a portion of the stuff you notified us had been recently stolen from the Mansion House."

"I am glad to hear it."

He was shown a valise which had been taken from the Jew when arrested.

Sure enough, there was a part of the missing jewelry.

"I would like to have a little private talk with the prisoner," the detective said.

"Certainly. Warden?"

"Here, sir."

"Conduct Mr. West to No. —."

A few minutes later, West was standing before the Jew, who sat on the hard bench of his cell, rocking to and fro like some old granny with a baby in her arms.

"Well, my friend, I am pleased to come across you here."

"Vat you will haf, eh? You come here to make fums mit me? I haf done not'ing. Why I am helt in dis blaces for doing not'ings, tell me dot?"

"So you were off for a little journey?"

"Yahs, I leave t'e cities."

"Exactly—and with other peoples' property in your possession—"

"Dot was a lie. I haf not'ing of what was not mine own."

"Come, old man, we've got you in a hole. Better show up honest for once, or it will go pretty hard with you."

"W'ot you mean by dot?"

The detective seated himself on the bench beside the Jew, and laid one hand on the latter's knee in a most sociable way.

"Jacobs," he said, "I am going to give you a chance."

"You gif me a chances?"

"Yes, it is your last, too, remember. Now, you are getting on in years. Ponder on that fact. I hardly think you would survive a long imprisonment, do you?"

Jacobs looked at the speaker who addressed him in the suavest manner possible.

"I was going to prison? What I haf done?"

West here removed the portion of the disguise which he had assumed, and it left him in still another masquerade, which was the same he wore when Electro Pete and the Jew had sent him down to his death—as they supposed—in the pit under the floor of the Thames street den.

The effect was remarkable.

Off from the bench slid Jacobs; down on his knees he went, and his skinny hands clasped together prayerfully.

"Haf mercy on my olt head! So hellup me gracious, I was not t'e one to seek your deat!"

"You know me, do you?"

"Yahs," whined the old villain.

"Well, then, let me tell you that I mean business now. I have sufficient evidence to send you up for a long term. I will give you a chance, as I say."

"W'ot you will haf?"

"A clean give 'way on the whole gang."

"T'e gang?" with a last attempt at a hypocrisy which was his second nature.

"Yes, the gang. I mean the wharf rats of Locust Point. Come, I want the whole thing. I want to know who Electro Pete is; I want to know who stole the diamonds from the man at the Mansion House; I want an explanation of how that robbery was committed. Finally, you will give me some explanation of how the man who is called Electro Pete can resolve himself into a column of fire every time he is touched by any one. The whole thing, old man, or else—"

"Else what you will do?"

"Up you go!" and the detective made a motion with one of his fingers significantly in the air.

Then while the cringing Jew seemed to hesitate, he added:

"Who killed the girl, Rachel?"

The words were hardly uttered when Jacobs sprung to his feet and backward, as if to escape some gripe from a dreaded object, and his little ratty eyes were filled with a look of burning terror.

"How you know dot?" he fairly yelped. "I tolt you I haf not murdered t'e girl. It wos Pete—Electro Pete. I haf not'ing to do mit dot."

"Ah! Pete murdered her, did he?"

"Yahs, so hellup me—"

"You are ready to swear to this?"

"I shwear!"

"She is dead, then?"

"I t'ink so—I t'ink so!"

"Why do you only think so?"

"Sh!"

He advanced again to West's side and with one finger placed to his lips, as if to guard against another's overhearing, began to tell a strange story in a hissing whisper that came rapidly, like one who speaks with but a few moments to spare.

Evidently the Jew was impressed with the fact that there was no earthly use in evading the man before him.

In the hope of being "let down" easy, he proceeded to give West some information that was startling.

When he had finished, he said:

"Now t'en, you will not be so hart on a poor olt mans, eh?"

"I'll see what I can do for you toward lessening your term."

"De term? W'ot!—you wos going to let a poor olt mans be sent up py t'e jail?" in whining amazement.

"I guess you'll have to go, Jacobs; you've been in too many dark deeds that have been perpetrated in the harbor, by your own tale. I shall soon have all the rats bagged; and maybe, if you give straight testimony against them—and particularly Electro Pete—I can have things eased on you a little."

"Yahs, I give him straight—I do dot alretty. You fint t'e rest of dot shewelry w'are I wos said."

And when the detective withdrew, the sly Jew rubbed his eely hands over and over, while he grinned ravenously and muttered in gay humor:

"Ha! ha! W'ot I gare for t'e wharf rads by t'e Locust Point? I gif dem away—everybodys—but w'ot I shall safe mysellef! But I must look oud for dot Electro Pete; he wos a deffil mit t'e knife if anybodys make him ankry. I tolt w'ot I shall know 'boud dose wharf rads, ant t'en I glear me oud fun de cities."

It was daylight when West came out from the station.

"Keep the little Jew fast and tight," he had remarked to the captain. "He is an important witness in the diamond robbery at the Mansion House."

Proceeding straightway to the Agency, he was handed a note by the clerk.

It was from Mark Daniels. And the following were the thrilling contents:

"WEST:—The diamond robber spotted. Would like to see you before I close in on the game."

"DANIELS."

The missive was written from the Mansion House, as its heading of print indicated.

Though pretty well worn out, West would not delay a minute now in conferring with his partner.

The trail was drawing to a climax.

If Daniels had spotted the actual burglar of the diamonds, then there were but few things to be settled for his own satisfaction before the mystery of the wharf rat band, as far as it was concerned with the girl supposed to be the criminal Anice Idello, would be cleared up.

"Any news from the house on Thames street?" he inquired, of the clerk.

"None, sir, as yet—excepting that it is still under a close watch."

"Telephone to Lowry, at the Deutch Apotheke on Broadway, and tell him to change his man for a rest. I am going to the Mansion House. If there is any word from Thames street, let me know at once."

With this order he hurried to join Daniels.

He found his partner in the office of the hotel.

"What have you discovered?"

"Two things," replied Daniels, as the two stepped out onto the portico.

And he added:

"The robber—the diamond thief is, beyond all dispute, this fellow who is passing off for a music teacher, who calls himself Calis Alfiero."

"You express yourself pretty confidently."

Daniels's eyestwinkled.

"I am warranted in so doing, when I have seen him at the trick."

"Ah! You have learned how it was done?"

"I have seen him doing it."

Pausing for a moment to enjoy West's surprise, he continued:

"Come up-stairs with me. If you had kept up your watch in the room you engaged, you would have sooner or later found out just what I have."

They entered the room where we have seen Daniels at his stealthy vigil.

"Wait a moment."

He tip-toed to the keyhole, and having applied his eye to the opening, said:

"Sh! He is going out."

"The Italian?"

"Yes."

"What then?"

"I'll show you. Wait until he has gone."

A few seconds later they heard the door of the adjoining room open and close, and the sound of a key turning in the lock.

Then Daniels said:

"Come."

They went to the door of the room occupied by the pseudo music-teacher.

With a skeleton key, Daniels opened the door.

Almost the first thing which greeted their eyes was the new valise which had been purchased by Dimble in pursuance of Daniels's plan to bait the adroit thief.

The article stood in plain view, near the wash-stand.

CHAPTER XXI.

A DUALITY OF ROGUES.

MARK DANIELS proceeded at once to show what he had discovered by means of the key-hole.

It would appear that the upper hallway, in which this room fronted, had at one time been broader than it was now.

A number of years previous, to give more room in the apartments, a portion of the wall had been moved outward, encroaching on the entry.

At intervals along the entry, and at one side, there had been small register-like ventilators opening from the floor above to the ceiling below—somewhat like those which may be observed to-day at Winder's building, Washington.

The moving of the wall had thrown these ventilators within the rooms in some instances; though the carpeting above and the ceiling papering below would conceal their existence from any save a prying eye or a previously informed person.

The Italian, Calis Alfiero, must either have known of these ventilators, or had discovered the one in his room by accident.

A rug was placed over it; when Daniels lifted the rug, there was revealed the opening with its small grating.

The grating was like a section of flue. Lifting this out, a plain view of Dimble's room was had.

The space between the bureau and the corner below was where the drummer's valise had stood.

Considering that the ceiling paper of the room underneath was very dark and in plaid-like pattern, it had been a simple matter to cut through with a sharp knife round the edge of the ventilator frame, and the incision was hardly noticeable.

In the center of the apartment there was a large rug.

Next overturning this, Daniels said:

"The rascal took his cue from finding that ventilator. This spot is directly over the center-piece in the ceiling below. Look!"

The flooring had been sawed deftly through. The lathing had been carefully removed until it was possible to fix a strong screw with a ring into the smaller center of the plaster cast, to prevent it falling downward, and a small trap was created that served the same purpose as the ventilator.

"I can understand why the opening at the ventilator would not be noticed," West said. "But to have done this, there must have been some mutilation of the ceiling—"

"Not with one who understood his business, as this fellow assuredly did. He had inspected Dimble's room before beginning operations, and knew exactly what he had to do. Having secured the center-piece by the ring, as you see, he sawed around it; and around the mold below, there is a fancy circle of many outlines, in the blending edges of which the small saw he used cut a line that would not be seen. Now then, here is the means employed to bring up the plunder."

He advanced to the bureau.

The drawers were locked; but a little manipulation with an instrument he carried in his

pocket for just such emergencies soon opened the drawer nearest the top.

In the drawer lay a carefully-coiled rope of silken twist with a smaller silken thread of strong texture attached.

On one end of the rope was a spring that operated a number of claw-like hooks much like the patent fishing apparatus in use among the fishermen of some localities.

The larger rope lowered this contrivance; the smaller line served to spring the grasping claws. Anything once within the clutch of the hooks was sure to remain until released by the manipulator.

Thus provided, and with the openings in the ceiling, it had been an easy matter to draw up the plunder from the room of Dimble.

"But the diamonds," suggested West, while they surveyed the Italian's mode of robbery. "You recollect that the drummer said he had placed them beneath his pillow—"

"And I have my opinion regarding that."

"What is it?"

"I have ascertained that our friend Dimble is fond of a little toddy before retiring. He may not have placed the belt of diamonds under his pillow, as he asserted, though probably firmly believing that he did."

"Possibly."

And West added:

"Shall we close in on the rogue?"

"Not yet."

"Why?"

"Because I have another thing to find out—a matter as much for the gratification of my own curiosity as anything else."

"I think I know what you mean."

"That little business of setting himself on fire whenever he gets in a pinch," said Daniels, with a nod.

"Very well. And now I have something to tell you in turn—"

"Better get out of here. I don't want to startle the fellow too soon. And there is another matter to be settled yet. I want to know how he gained access to the room of Oriole St. Dyer."

"You think it was he who frightened her by his ghostly visits?" queried West, as they left the room, after carefully hiding any possible trace of their presence.

"It must be."

"I am inclined to differ with you."

"What is it you have to say?"

They were back in their own room, and Daniels closed the door, speaking in a guarded tone.

"I have seen the Jew. He's juggled."

"Ah!"

"The man hauled into the northeastern station is that very worthy individual. A greater portion of the missing jewelry was found in his possession and recognized by the captain from the descriptions we sent to all the stations. I judge that there is not now so much as a thousand dollars' worth of the property missing. And I have a confession from the man, Jacobs, which may result in my recovering that. I have enough ground, after hearing the confession of which I speak, for asserting that the man known as Electro Pete, and this fellow who gave us his name as Pietro Idello, and who registers under the name of Calis Alfiero, are entirely different persons."

"The trail is still tangled," said Daniels musingly. "But of one thing I am satisfied."

"What is that?"

"The girl who calls herself Oriole St. Dyer is in danger of death at the hands of either Electro Pete or this Calis Alfiero; and Calis Alfiero believes her to be Anice Idello."

"He is mistaken. Anice Idello is dead—murdered."

"How do you know that?"

"I have it from the Jew. She was killed by Electro Pete, and I have information which will lead me to the place where she was concealed by her murderer—the place into which she vanished when you and I went up-stairs in the Thames street den and found her gone."

"She is positively dead?"

"So declares the Jew."

"I will not believe it till I see her—'Sh!"

Daniels paused suddenly and placed a finger to his lips.

Some one was moving about in the next room.

"The Italian," he whispered.

Stepping to the keyhole, he looked through.

The next instant he beckoned his partner forward, and there was the light of a discovery in his eyes.

Without a word, West advanced lightly and looked through to the adjoining room.

Yes, there was the tall and lightly built Italian. He was scrupulously attired, and at the moment was drawing off a pair of colored kid gloves, while his long and curled-end mustache curled still more in a sinister smile that seemed carved into his peculiarly white face.

"Do you see anything?" whispered the voice of Daniels in the looker's ear.

"I see the Italian."

"Nothing else?"

And he pursued in that low whisper that

could not have been heard at a distance of two feet from his lips;

"Gauge every outline well. I am about to point out something strange to you—something that I have only discovered myself within the past minute."

"Ha!" fell from West.

His partner's words had sharpened the vision of the senior.

"Well?"

"I have made the same discovery, I think."

"Name it."

"This man is not the one who came to the Agency."

"True. And though he and that man are so alike that the difference could hardly be discovered, let me tell you that is not the same man who left that apartment a short time ago!"

And true it seemed to the watching detective.

Whoever the party now was who acted the part of the pseudo music-teacher, he was not the Calis Alfiero registered on the book of the hotel, not the one who had come to the Agency to put the suspicion of a murder on Oriole St. Dyer as the girl who had murdered her father before she renounced the name of Anice Idello.

"Who do you imagine he can be?" questioned West, stepping away from the keyhole.

"I am satisfied that there can be but one person who resembles our music-teacher: Electro Pete."

"They must be partners in guilt then."

"Looks decidedly that way. And I think there is but one way to solve the mystery without closing in prematurely."

"What is the way?"

"Anice Idello must be found and her story told."

"But the Jew says she is dead to a certainty, and Electro Pete killed her."

"As I said before, I doubt it. I have a feeling that she is alive."

"Then we shall soon know."

"Where are you going?" as West made toward the door.

"To the house on Thames street. Don't let that fellow in the next room get out of your sight now even for a minute."

"Trust me," returned Daniels, who forthwith prepared another disguise, while West departed to investigate the truthfulness of certain information he had frightened out of the man Jacobs.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE REAL ANICE IDELLO.

SLEEPLESS trailers were these two men, Mark Daniels and his senior, West.

The latter hastened toward Thames street by a White Line car, which he took at the foot of St. Paul street.

At the corner of Thames and Broadway, he caught sight of a man near the curb, whom he hailed, at the same time leaving the platform of the car.

"Any news, Lowry?"

"Nothing in particular. I have just put on a fresh man."

"Only one man there?—there ought to be two, one at the front and one at the rear."

"So there has been all night; I have been the second man myself."

"Good."

"There's no need of two by daylight. Come this way and I'll show you."

The man called Lowry led the way to a tall warehouse that adjoined the premises of the den.

From a small window in the fourth story a man was watching the bounds of the junk-shop; and West saw that nothing could transpire at front or rear without this spy being able to see it from his favorable concealment.

"Several persons have been to the small door in the large door of the junk-shop at the front," said Lowry, "but I suppose they were only intending customers, and they went away when they found the place locked up."

"Perhaps they were. But you saw nothing particularly suspicious?"

"Nothing."

In West's mind he was satisfied that those who had come to the shop of Jacobs were either some of the wharf rats, or part of the gang that plied the bunko game in the rear of the dwelling.

"I am going into that house," he said, to the shadow on watch. "I do not anticipate any trouble that I cannot get myself out of; but if you hear a revolver-shot, come in, if you have to batter down the door, for it will mean that I am in a tight squeeze."

"All right, Mr. West."

With this little precaution, West descended from the warehouse and proceeded around to the rear of the junk-shop.

A little to his surprise, he found the gate unlatched.

Boldly entering the yard, he advanced to the side door.

This was fastened.

"Ah, the cellar," he thought. "But let me

be a little more careful than I was before. I have no desire to undergo so narrow a shave for my life as I did here yesterday. It is no gang of novices I am dealing with."

West was now prepared to carry on an investigation with some conveniences, and in an entirely different manner than that which had marked his first entrance into the dwelling of the Jew.

Descending into the cellar, he paused to turn on his dark lantern, and flashing this ahead, he went up the joisted stairs, stepping lightly from force of habit.

In the room above, where we have seen him on a former occasion, he found the yawning trap in the floor, from which he had been so providentially rescued by Daniels.

A tomb-like silence prevailed, and he turned the lantern hither and thither in the darkened room, before advancing further.

Through the shop he went; and his keen eyes saw something that was momentarily arresting.

There was a bareness, contrasted with the recent appearance of the place when he and Daniels had last been there.

"Ah, yes, it is no gang of novices. Notwithstanding I have had the place so closely watched, there has been somebody here and they have removed something from this sly fence. But now for the secret room the Jew spoke about!"

Through the shop and up the stairs he went, the lantern raying brilliantly before him; and he confessed to himself that he had some apprehension of another trap at every step.

In the second-story room where we have seen him and Daniels nonplused by the disappearance of the girl, Rachel, he strode to the center of the floor, and the lantern was turned slowly along that portion of the wall which was directly opposite the door.

While doing this, he was muttering:

"The fourth panel in the papering. A button about breast high, half-concealed by the natural shadow or shading of the stripes in the paper—Ha! there it is."

He stepped briskly toward a tiny button that was visible plainly to one who might be looking for that very thing, and in following the instruction that had been part of that confession of the Jew, pressed on it stoutly.

So far the Jew had spoken the truth.

Instantly a slide in the wall moved aside, and he saw beyond another apartment.

Into this he stepped.

And the first thing he saw almost brought a cry from him.

In the center stood the girl, Rachel.

Sight of her produced upon him the same effect it had upon Daniels. He would have sworn that in her he saw Oriole St. Dyer.

She was erect. Her face was very pale. On her brow there was a trace of a recent wound.

She gazed at the detective steadily, and he perceived that she was endeavoring to control some great inward excitement.

For a few seconds a mutual silence reigned.

The girl was first to speak, and in a strained way!

"Well, sir?"

Her voice broke the spell that had momentarily held the detective.

"So, you are not dead, miss?"

"Dead? I do not understand you, sir. Who are you? What do you want here?"

There was an attempt at naturalness in the delivery of her speech, but it could not deceive him.

"Come, miss, there is no use in you and I beating about the bush. I am looking for you."

"Looking for me," in a visible trepidation.

"What do you want?"

"I want to know who you are."

"I am Rachel, the daughter of Simon Jacobs, the Jew—"

"Oh, no, you are not."

"But I tell you I am!" with some vehemence.

"My girl, I am a detective. I am unraveling a mystery. I say I am unraveling it—not merely trying. Come, you might as well come out plainly with me, for I shall not leave the trail I am on until everything is made clear."

Rachel clasped her hands in a manner that West took to be an evidence of some great inward struggle.

This she mastered in the next second, and taking a step forward said:

"Sit down, sir. If you are a detective, I will answer anything you may question me about, if it is in my power."

She pushed forward a chair, and West was too intent with watching her face to notice that she placed the chair on a small mat, and that the bottoms of the legs of the chair were set in glass adherent cups.

He sat down.

She drew another chair near.

"There is a considerable mystery attached to you," he said.

"What like, sir?"

"You look very much like a girl for whom the authorities of the Italian capital are offering a reward."

"What has she done?"

"Murder."

"And you think I am the girl?"

"That is just what I wish to find out. Be

candid. If you are not, I shall be compelled to arrest you. Tell me—who are you?"

"I have already answered that question."

"But it is not satisfactory. Now, let me tell you, if you are not Anice Idello, I am your best friend, and I can save you from those who are I know your implacable enemies."

Hardly had he spoken the words, when the girl jumped from the chair and began walking rapidly to and fro before him, wringing her hands like one in mental misery, while she cried:

"It is no use! I am hunted, haunted, pursued forever by that crime which I never committed! Oh, I have lived by night and by day with the phantom before me of a murdered face for which I am not to blame! I am hounded down at last, when the American detectives are so close upon my track, and I know that there is enough evidence in Italy to clear me if it was not for the cruel web which my persecutor has woven around me. I am tired! I am at bay! By every means I first strove to elude the man who at last found me and nearly killed me in this very house. By every means I have striven to hide myself from the law that unjustly pursues me. But I will do so no longer. I will do battle! I am a woman beset and at bay, I say!"

"You are Anice Idello, then?" the detective interpolated.

"Yes!" with an accent almost of frenzy. "I am Anice Idello! But it will do you little good to know that. Ha, ha! you would arrest me for the murder of my father, Pedro Catazky! Try it! Move from that chair if you can! Let me see you lay a hand upon me. Yes, I am Anice Idello, the child who is pursued by the law for the murder of her father. I am she who left her husband, Pietro Idello, because it was he who really committed that crime, and who tried to avoid him under the guise of the child of Simon Jacobs. But I shall prefer Pietro at the last to the ignominy, the death that will be mine, if I yield to you, a hated detective. I will not yield. And I shall kill you where you sit before I will go with you."

Notwithstanding her frenzy, the detective laughed lightly at this threat.

A man accustomed as he was to handling hardened criminals, did not apprehend much trouble with a frail girl should he choose to capture her.

"I am glad I have found the murderer of Pedro Catazky," he said, smilingly.

"I am not the murderer, though the evidence will convict me, I know. And it is because of that I now defy you and tell you that you will never leave this room alive!"

"Come, miss, I think I will have to arrest you, if for nothing else than the fact that you may prove an important witness in something I am working up just now, and if you did not kill Pedro Catazky, you will have ample opportunity—"

He paused.

The girl had halted before him, and her symmetrical body was bent, with hands half-raised, in an attitude of suspense.

Her coal-black eyes burned with an astonishing fire.

"Move! Move!" she cried. "Stir from that chair if you can!"

A thrill that was like the chill of death passed over the detective, as he found himself held in the chair by an invisible something that was stronger than bands of iron.

Not a motion could he make.

And the beautiful girl now fairly glowered over him until her lineaments lost their loveliness in a malicious exultation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE TRUE SIDE OF THE CATAZKY MURDER.

In all his life, the detective had never experienced such a sensation as crept over him at the moment.

He sat and gazed at the beautiful girl—now like some beautiful fiend—as one will gaze at the brilliant and fascinating orbs of a deadly reptile.

A slight tingling, and not unpleasant feeling pervaded his every fiber—only transiently, however; and when it had passed, he smiled again, saying:

"Why do you dare me to move from this chair?"

A smile that was distorting, while it displayed her white and even teeth, curled her lips, as she replied:

"Because, when I first spoke, you were not capable of it. Now you can do so if you wish; but let me warn you of one thing before you attempt it."

"Well?"

"The very instant you place a foot beyond that mat on which the chair rests, you will be a dead man."

"I am hardly afraid of a woman like you."

"When you know that I am desperate? Ay, I vow to you that I will not be taken by the American detectives for a crime of which I am innocent, yet for which there is in existence sufficient evidence to convict me."

"Yet I shall take you—"

"Sit still!—sit still!" she broke in, sharply.

West saw that there was something about his position which made the girl confident that she

had him in her power. He was too old a hand to proceed rashly; he would wait further developments.

"Do you object to telling me why I will be a dead man the instant I leave this chair, as you say?"

"You have the use of your limbs?"

"Yes, I think so," stretching his legs and moving his arms.

"Did you feel a strange sensation a moment since?"

"Yes."

"Can you guess what it means?"

"No."

"I'll tell you. Within the short time you have been sitting there, you have been powerfully charged with electricity. The amount put into your system is sufficient to kill a man if the circuit is completed. Move one step from that mat, and you will tread upon the completing wires! The mat is fashioned underneath with woven glass; the legs of the chair on which you sit, as you can perceive, are set in glass cups. Now do you comprehend? Step off if you dare—and you kill yourself by the action of electricity that is in you."

There was no doubting the sincerity of the girl, as she cried forth this thrilling revelation.

And at that juncture there was another party to the scene.

A cupboard-like door at one side of the room opened, and into the apartment stepped the tall, sleek, sinister-browed Italian, Pietro Idello—the same who had called at the agency in regard to the Catazky murder case.

"I have the honor," he said, grinning infernally, as he advanced to a position directly before the detective, "to hope that you are in excellent health."

"Pretty well, considering," rejoined West, nonchalantly.

"You have heard what the girl has said?—you are in danger of your life if you make a motion."

"Well, what kind of an ending is this scene to have?"

"You shall hear it soon enough. You are a sneak after the wharf rats of Locust Point, eh? You have escaped death in this very house once before. This time you will not escape."

"Oh, then you mean to kill me outright?"

West was remarkably composed.

One of his hands was within the pocket of his loose jacket, clutching the pistol. He knew that, come what might, he could accomplish two things: he could either kill the Italian or bring assistance by merely firing his weapon.

"If that is my intention," sibilated the Italian, "before it is done, I shall tell you that you are a great fool to undertake to come between man and wife. This is Anice Idello. We saw you entering the premises; I convinced her that you were after her for the murder of her father in Italy, and we at once concluded to forget our differences and join against you. We have brought you into a very neat trap. You are entirely at our mercy."

"But you make a mistake in one thing."

"Indeed," with a shrug and bow. "What is that?"

"I am not after this girl for any murder at all."

A little cry came from the one whom we have called Rachel.

"I am after you, Pietro Idello, for that crime and the burglary of the diamonds at the Mansion House. I shall take you in with the bracelets on yet."

"Ha, ha," derisively. "We shall see about that."

"Well, if I am not to have any show for my life, will you object to telling me, before you put me out of the way, what this mystery is between you and the other Italian who so much resembles you?"

"As you say, you are to die. No, I have no objection. You are speaking of Guiseppe Duoro."

"Ha!"

The slim-limbed Idello laughed with grim gayety.

"So you have been perplexed, eh, by the resemblance between myself and Guiseppe Duoro? Well, it is a little strange. But then we are natives of the same clime; grew under the same sun; are of the same age and height; a careful attention to the complexion and the trimming of the mustache has wrought the striking likeness. We have done this for a purpose; we are, as you may have discovered—or that partner of yours, whom I tried to drown at Locust Point—professional thieves for whom the great city of New York has grown too hot. Our excellent band of rascals is progressing slowly southward. It is a neat trick for Guiseppe and myself to take our room at a hotel—and always one or the other of us is to be found there. Suspicion of anything crooked would never rest on Signor Alfiero, the music-teacher. Guiseppe Duoro it was, as I told you when I visited your office, who furnished the electric instrument to kill Pedro Catazky. But he did not give it to the beautiful Anice at all; he gave it to me—"

"You admit, then, that it was you who killed Pedro Catazky?"

"Why should I deny it to you, when you will never leave this room alive?"

"Not a very pleasant prospect, truly."

"Listen, if you choose, and I will tell you this little story that has come out of the murder of Pedro Catazky."

"Go on, old man," said the detective, with a coolness that rather surprised the Italian.

"I was lawfully wedded to this girl, Anice"

—leveling one of his long white fingers at her.

"We were to fly on that very night when Catazky was murdered. Yes. It was I who applied to the head of the sleeping man the charge that killed him instantly. The instrument was furnished by Guiseppe Duoro. Anice and I fled to France. There I squandered what money we had raised on her jewelry. There, in a drunken fit, I boasted of how I had put her father out of the way, and urged that she return to possess herself of her inheritance. She spurned me and the proposition, and in a passion of hate left me, as she vowed, forever. But I was not to be dropped so easily. I pursued her. I communicated with Guiseppe, and he, with the prospect of a rich slice from the estate, made a confession to the authorities that he had sold the deadly instrument to Anice Catazky on the afternoon preceding the night when her father was so mysteriously murdered. He explained to them how the thing could be applied beneath the hair and produce death without leaving any trace. The authorities at once started on the trail of Anice. I found her and apprised her of the net that had been spread about her; her flight at the time aided my plot by increasing suspicion. But she was no child. I will pay her that compliment. She happened to know that Guiseppe Duoro belonged to a family whose record in the past was stained by several imprisonments, one of which was for murder. In the city of Paris she performed a trick that was, to say the least, remarkably clever."

"She wrote a letter, in which she stated that she, Anice Catazky, had witnessed the murder of her father. The one who committed the murder was no other than the electrician, Guiseppe Duoro. Being discovered as she was escaping from the vicinity of the fateful bedroom, she was seized and abducted, not knowing even then, at the writing of the letter where she was, except that she was confined, a prisoner, in a large house that fronted on a square. Before just such a house, she dropped the letter, addressed to the Italian authorities. It was found by some honest person, who conveyed it direct to the prefect. News of the document was at once sent to Rome. Guiseppe's family connections were against him; he was held in prison while search was being made for Anice Catazky. She, meantime, had eluded me again and crossed the ocean. I went to Rome, and after some years procured the release of my friend Guiseppe, against whom no direct testimony could be found. And it was because of this little affair, that the Italian consuls of various cities in America have taken no very vigorous steps for the apprehension of Anice Catazky. When he was liberated, Guiseppe swore that he would search the world over and, finding Anice, would assuredly take her life for the smart trick which he had turned upon him to his discomfiture."

"It was at this time that we became the thieves we have been since. For to prosecute our search, we must have funds, and procuring the release of Guiseppe had exhausted all that we both had. Another thing: I did not want Guiseppe to kill my little bride; for there was a vast inheritance for her in Italy if I could manage so as to free her from the suspicion which still to a great extent rested upon her. We kept together closely. In Chicago, we found her. Guiseppe was for assassinating her without mercy. But my counsel prevailed. I proposed to bleed her for all the money which she seemed to have—for she was making a good show, and lived at a highly-respectable hotel. 'People cannot do that without money,' I said to Guiseppe. 'No,' he agreed, 'and we will have some of it.' Just here, a singular thing happened. Anice underwent a metamorphosis! She was still under our surveillance; but suddenly I became possessed with the idea that it was not she. This proved true. I discovered that some one was personating Anice—though for what purpose I cannot imagine. At all events, Anice had vanished again."

"But of this fact, Guiseppe seemed not to be aware. He still believed that the beautiful girl upon whose trail we hung like waiting vampires, was Anice. I did not say anything to shake his faith in that fact. For I planned that Guiseppe should continue pursuit of this strange girl who was playing the part of Anice—kill her if he was so minded; then, if I was so fortunate as to find the real Anice, I would compel her by some means to return with me to Italy, get the inheritance by a few false oaths against Guiseppe, and while he fled hither and thither, pursued by the law, we could enjoy our wealth. In Chicago, we met with the Jew, Jacobs. Then and there was formed the formidable gang of which I have since been the leader."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A LITTLE CHANGE IN THE TABLEAU.

As the Italian paused at this point in his recital, West interrogated, calmly:

"You are so very accommodating, suppose you relieve my mind of an enormous suspense and tell me which of you—yourself or this Guiseppe Duoro—is known as Electro Pete?"

"Oh, readily. We are both of us that person. In the same way that we pass for one another at the hotel, so do we pass among our excellent little gang. Electro Pete is always in disguise, however."

"And which of you was it who entered the room of Miss St. Dyer, at the Mansion House?"

"It was Guiseppe."

"How was it accomplished?"

"Aha! you detectives cannot see everything. The window of Guiseppe's room opens on the court of the hotel—so does that of the young lady's room. The last is directly beneath the window of Guiseppe's apartment. The young lady never thinks to fasten the catch on the top of the sash. You begin to see, eh?" and he rubbed his white hands over and over.

"Well, no, I don't exactly catch on."

"Guiseppe is strong and was once the best acrobat in his school of the gymnasium. How very easy, then, for him to let himself down to the sill of the young lady's room with a rope, and when he shall choose, climb up again."

"Quite clever," acknowledged West. "And what has been the object of his monkey-like visits?"

"To kill her. But each time he has made some noise which awoke her, and he knew that he could not accomplish an assassination without bringing the hotel about his ears if she should cry out. So, he grasped her in his electric jacket, which stops the cry instantly and give her such a shock that she fall senseless."

"The electric—what?"

"The jacket. See—we both wear one. It is impossible for one to come in contact with us without receiving a shock sufficient to hurl him or her backward into insensibility."

The Italian threw open his coat. Beneath was a vest of mail-like glass so fine as to be pliant in its minute links.

Throughout these links ran a series of wires which, illuminated by electricity, would give the wearer the appearance of being suddenly resolved into a blaze.

At the back of the vest was a non-conducting case charged with the fluid. A small affair adapted to the shape of the body, and being hardly observable above the hip.

The operator had simply to push a slide on the top of the case, and the effect was instantly produced.

In addition, there was a small glass cylinder that rested in a socket on the top, having metallic terminals, something like the cylinders of an ordinary battery.

The hand that moved the slide could simultaneously snatch forth this cylinder and apply it to any object within reach of the little coil of wire with which it was supplied.

Then followed the phenomenon, accompanied by the downfall of any human being beneath the terrible shock.

The person of the operator was thoroughly protected by the wires of the mail passing entirely within the glass links; the hand that delivered the shock was free from hurt because of the glass top of the cylinder.

A novel and formidable piece of armament.

"It is an invention of Guiseppe's," said the Italian, as he freely displayed and explained the apparatus.

"Suppose you tell me another thing," West said.

"I shall with pleasure tell you anything," rejoined Pietro, grinning in his infernal way.

"What was the object in trying to put us on the track of the young lady, Miss St. Dyer, as the murderess of Pedro Catazky?"

"Ah, that is a part of my little plan to keep Guiseppe from finding the real Anice Idello."

"You are a smart fellow."

Pietro bowed.

"But you have overstepped yourself a little in this case."

"Oh, no I have not."

"I shall convince you against your will presently," declared West, significantly.

And he added, turning to the girl:

"Do you realize what you are doing, when you consent to be a party to this scoundrel's plot—this man who has murdered your father and who now boasts of it to your face?"

"I only know that if you are destroyed, I am safe; for the net that is woven around me would convict me of patricide. I join hands with this man, because I am afraid of death—ah! yes, I am a coward, and afraid to die!"

"But you are all wrong. I can prove your innocence, after what this over-smart fellow has given away. Your best plan is to aid me in getting out of this fix; and I can promise you that very shortly I will have this murderer and his accomplice, Guiseppe Duoro, behind prison bars."

He was interrupted by a loud and demoniac laugh from the Italian, who said, at the same time producing a gleaming knife:

"You will have us behind the prison bars, eh? Ha, ha, ha! Well, let us see if a dead man can place Pietro Idello there. For in exactly five minutes I shall cut your throat from ear to ear!"

As he uttered the ghastly threat, he began to roll up the sleeve of his right arm the hand of which grasped firmly the blade of steel.

Not a muscle of the detective's face or form quivered.

Steadily he eyed the man.

The fated seconds were passing.

Then one minute was gone.

"If you wish to say your prayers, be quick about it," hissed the Italian, when he had prepared arm and hand for the murderous stroke.

"For see: the hand of this watch is going round rapidly and sure. When the time is up—you die!"

"Go ahead with your racket, old man."

The other's calmness caused the eyes of the Italian to fix upon him searchingly.

"You do not fear death."

"Oh, I guess I'm not going to die just yet."

"Why do you say that?"

"Did you think I was such a fool as to come into this place without any of my assistants knowing where I was? Why, I have but to give a signal—and of a kind that I know can be heard beyond these old frame walls—and you will find yourself in the clutch of the law."

"You will give a signal?"

"That's what I said."

"Bah! I do not believe you have any one near."

"You will find out to the contrary soon enough."

"How will you signal any one through these walls—"

"With this!"

As he uttered the words, West drew his revolver with a lightning-like movement and leveled it at the head of the Italian.

The latter gave one glance. Then he laughed again in his discordant tone.

"Ha, ha, ha! You think to frighten me with that?"

"Oh, I wouldn't frighten you for the world."

"Your weapon is not cocked; and before you can cock it—"

He made as if to spring upon his intended victim, the knife poised for the stroke.

But he paused. He saw something that he had not calculated upon. There was a motion of the hammer slightly upward without the hold upon the stock being altered in the least.

Pietro Idello knew by what he saw, that the detective had a self-cocking weapon.

"Yes, it is cocked, old man. Take care there. If you come a single step nigher, I shall press a little harder on this trigger, and—down you go!"

Pietro recoiled, gnashing his teeth. For he fully realized that, under the circumstances, the detective would not hesitate to fire a bullet into his body.

"Curse you!"

"Take care, my friend. Curses sometimes come home to roost, you know— Hold! not a move there, or down you go. I said that if you advanced, I would bore a hole through you; I now promise to do the same thing if you attempt to retreat. Stand exactly where you are. Do not budge either forward or backward. I think it is now my turn, to make a little speech."

Steadily as a carved image sat the detective, with the leveled revolver.

The astounded and enraged Italian glanced straight into the deadly tube and saw that a bead was drawn upon his head.

He knew too well the character of the man he was dealing with to disregard his danger and make any attempt to evade that unwavering aim.

The tables were completely turned.

Knife in hand, and with one sleeve rolled up, stood the baffled wretch, and the expression of his visage—though he obeyed the command to stand where he was—presented a picture so terrifically satanic, that even the detective gazed curiously at him.

Keeping the Italian under his eye and aim, West addressed himself to the girl.

"Look here, miss, as I said, you are going all wrong. Don't you see, after what this fellow has confessed—like a fool—in your presence, I can put the whole blame of the murder of your father on him, with you as a witness? And I can bag his partner, Guiseppe Duoro, who will be glad enough to bear evidence against him, when he learns of the shabby trick this rogue would have played upon him. Come, I am the man for you to tie to—not him. And I am the friend you need to place you where neither this murderer or the law can break up the peace of your life. Be sensible. If there is a way to release me from the fix I believe I am in, avail of it. Destroy the connection with the battery that is charging me and only waiting for a completion of the circuit to cause my death. You will do a deed worthy of yourself and one that will bring its reward in the way I have stated."

Already a revulsion had taken place in the

feelings of the girl. It needed but this incentive to spur her to the very thing West wished.

Truly he was a man of nerve to remain so calm throughout the peril which he realized must be no idle boast on the part of Anice.

And despite his wonderful self-control, he could scarcely repress a start of joy, as she cried:

"I will! I will!"

She sprang to one side and grasped up a small chair.

This she raised above her head and ran toward the rear of the chair on which the detective sat, still with the raging Italian under the cover of his revolver.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DARK ROOM GAME.

The girl's object was apparent.

The small wire that connected with the chair, and carried thereto the current of electricity, was at its back.

So small was it that it had escaped the notice of the detective when he seated himself—as much because the darkened room, with its single scone at a far side, afforded but scant opportunity for distinguishing it.

The wire was then taut.

A blow from the poised chair would assuredly break it from its clinching in the back of the chair, after which the detective might step from the glass-bottomed mat with perfect safety.

But ere the chair could descend, there was an interruption.

"Hold you there, girl!"

Out from the panel stepped the slim figure of the other Italian, Guiseppe Duoro.

She paused, turning in a startled way toward the corner.

"So you, Pietro Idello, you have play me a smart, eh? You have fool me with the other girl, while this one is she whom I swore to kill. And you will go to Italy and make her the rich wife of yours, while I shall be pursued by the law? Aha! I have overheard everything. I am just in time. You are armed. We are Italians, my friend Pietro; we know what treachery shall call for between companions. Prepare yourself for a fight with me, my comrade Pietro!"

As he hissed the words, Guiseppe drew a knife similar to that which was in the hand of Pietro.

Like Pietro, he rolled up the sleeve of his right arm.

In the faces of both men there was a flame of passion.

The detective nodded toward the girl significantly.

Realizing his peril still, he feared something might further happen to deter her from her intention, and he saw that motion with the chair had an important something to do with his liberation.

"Bring down that chair," he whispered, while Guiseppe was speaking and glaring upon the cornered Pietro. "Strike! Make me free, or it may go hard with both you and me!"

Crash! fell the chair.

The wire was severed.

"The danger is past," she said.

The evil pair, attracted by the sound, both turned to look.

And they beheld the detective on his feet, now with two revolvers leveled, covering both their persons.

"My gay birds, surrender—"

An oath from Pietro broke in upon his speech.

"I can play my game best in the dark," he cried, accompanying the oath.

With a motion rapid as the lightning's flash, he hurled his knife toward the scone at the opposite side of the room.

A shatter of glass followed, and—darkness.

There was a silence like the tomb.

West transferred both weapons to one hand. With his disengaged hand he reached outward and gently but firmly grasped the wrist of the girl, pulling her toward him.

For he half-believed that this divertisement was but a move in concert between the two Italians, and the death of both himself and the girl was to be attempted in the impenetrable blackness which ensued upon the destruction of the scone.

He drew her noiselessly behind him, determined to shield her with his own body from the knives of the pair of assassins.

And silence—aching, terrible silence within that room.

This suddenly broken by a sound as of two bodies coming together; then a groan and a flame, which West knew was caused by the wonderful electric mail worn by the rogues.

By the light that flashed thus for an instant only, he saw the figure of Pietro Idello reel off and fall heavily.

Quickly at the other figure that stood in the attitude of one who has delivered a death-blow, he discharged his revolver.

A slight cry answered the shot, as of a man in pain.

Then again the terrible silence.

West felt a slight chill in his veins as he con-

cluded that the surviving Italian was creeping toward him.

Still retaining his grasp on the girl's wrist, he shifted his position on tip-toe to another portion of the room.

The minutes passed—torturous minutes they were to one who momentarily expected to find himself in the clinching gripe of a desperado who had no compunctions about the sacrifice of a human life.

But only silence.

Until at last he determined to force an issue.

Holding his revolver ready for a shot, he struck one of the patent fuses he carried in his pocket.

The tiny flame revealed that the room was empty.

Guiseppe was not there.

Nor was the apartment exactly empty, for there on the floor lay the dead body of Pietro.

"Oh, I am free! I am free!" murmured Anice, emotionally.

"Yes, my girl, you are free. That knife struck straight to his heart. Quick devils in the darkness are these Italians. You will nevermore be troubled by Pietro Idello. Come, let us be out of this. And one thing remember: I am your friend—not your enemy, as you at first supposed."

Lighting another fuse, West conducted the girl from the room and down the stairs that led to the shop.

Half-way down the light of day entered from a small round window that opened on the yard, so that there was no further need of the fuse.

Passing the door below, both saw a short and slim figure that went hopping away toward the rear gate as another figure approached from the direction of the junk-shop.

The first was the "Mercury" of the gang of wharf rats; the second was the man whom West had left on watch at the window of the adjoining warehouse.

"I heard the shot," he said, as he came up, "and was hurrying to see what it meant."

"It's all right now; though I have had a pretty close shave. Take this girl to the Agency. Miss, this is one of my assistants. Go with him. I will see you again soon and hear more of this complicated story which is woven in your life." And again to his man: "Have you seen anything of Daniels hereabout?"

"No."

West knew that his partner was keeping close to the trail of the duplicate Italian and expected to come across him in the vicinity.

In this he was not to be disappointed.

As the trio went out by the front entrance to the junk-shop, the senior espied a man attired in a waterman's garb, lounging against one of the wooden awning posts that abound along Thames street, smoking an old and blackened pipe.

But the character did not deceive West.

"Go on with the young lady, and make her comfortable until I see you again. Where is West?"

"Went home for a nap. He's been up all night."

"Anybody else around?"

"There wasn't—but here comes one of our brigade," and he pointed to a young man with a countryman's overcoat dangling around his dirty heels, who just then came in sight around the corner.

This individual passed them with only a sly wink from the corner of one eye, and West knew that the relief of the cordon he was keeping around the old house had arrived.

Anice accompanied the "shadow" toward Broadway.

West advanced to the waterman.

"There was a little knot of sailor-like stragglers near at the moment, so he said:

"I'm looking for Caroline street, my friend, can you show me which way it is?"

"Reckon so, if you kin set 'em up," replied the waterman, significantly.

"Come on, then."

The two entered a saloon.

At the rear of the dirty countered place, there was a table or two, and seating themselves at one of these, they called for beer.

Over the beer, when brought, they lingered familiarly.

And West acquainted Daniels—for he it was—with the adventure he had recently passed through.

"What about the body of the dead Italian?" queried Daniels.

"Bring an undertaker and a coroner to the house after dark."

"Do you want me to keep on the track of the other—this Guiseppe?"

"Guess you've lost him, haven't you?"

"By no means. I am looking at him now."

West followed the direction of his partner's eyes and saw standing at the bar a tall, apparently robust man with an immense overcoat on, in the act of drinking some bitters.

This party's face was almost wholly concealed by a beard; he seemed to get the drink down through the hair with some awkwardness.

"You mean that man drinking there?"

"I do."

"You think it is the Italian?"

"I do not think anything about it."

"How do you know?"

"Look at his eyes. Besides, you said you were sure you winged him more or less seriously when you fired in the dark room."

"Yes."

"Observe that he has only one arm in the sleeves of his overcoat. I imagine you struck him in the arm. And that, with those eyes which I have seen before and have good cause to remember, make me say: there is our Guiseppe Duoro."

"I leave him to you. I will look after this girl who has turned out to be the real Anice Idello. I wish to communicate too with Miss St. Dyer and have another interview with the Jew and the young man at the central station. The house is pretty well surrounded; I have hopes of bagging some of these wharf rats shortly, and with a few of them behind the wall on Madison street, we will, I think, have broken up the gang. Anything in the papers this morning about the Norwegian barque?"

"Plenty. The vessel was sacked completely, according to the plot of the rats which I overheard; and worse, the captain received a wound in a struggle with the harbor pirates which may prove his death."

"I would give much to find out whether it was Pietro Idello or his counterpart, this Guiseppe, who was engaged in that affair, if the captain dies. I want to send the surviving villain up for all he is worth—"

"Your man is going. I shall follow him," here interrupted Daniels, lowly.

The party at the bar, which the keener eyes of Daniels had identified as the Italian notwithstanding his disguise, was then moving toward the door.

Hardly had the door closed after him, when the sleuth was behind and near, though leaving the saloon in a way not to arrest the attention of the barkeeper, lest that personage should be in league with Guiseppe and in some way give him warning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A DETECTIVE'S NERVOUS DEED.

DANIELS followed his quarry.

The disguised Guiseppe proceeded across Broadway to the east side, thence down to the last corner before the ferry.

Turning to the left, he entered the alley of a rickety frame building, to all appearances unconscious of the fact that he was being shadowed.

Daniels was just in time, turning the corner, to see him enter the alley.

"Another den of the rats," muttered the detective, slacking his gait. "I must get into it. How?"

The keen eyes were busy glancing about for a suggestion of a means of ingress without betraying his prying intentions.

And it was not long before an item struck him that might have escaped the attention of eyes less keen than his own.

The house happened to be directly before one of those slips that make in at intervals along the Baltimore basin.

In the renowned deep water of the harbor, a large vessel was in the slip, the bowsprit of which fairly projected to within a few feet of the roof of the two-story dwelling where the Italian had entered.

A few moments later Daniels was on board the vessel and in conversation with the captain.

Later still, a sailor might have been noticed making his way forward over the bow-sprit, in obedience to a rough command from the weather-beaten captain, who was also hallooing orders to several others of his crew who were engaged in scraping the masts.

Daniels was right in supposing the house to be another haunt of the wharf rats.

The Italian entered the place boldly, and found in a lower room several vile-visaged creatures, who were making merry over tin cups filled with liquor.

"Hush this noise!" he commanded, closing and locking the door after him.

"Electro Pete!" they exclaimed, in one breath. "Here's luck, Cap, for the thousands we got out of your diamond affair—"

"Yes, you fools! And while you are drinking here, there is a net closing around you all that will get you into the penitentiary before twenty-four hours are gone; you understand a me, eh?"

"Oh, my heyes!" ejaculated an English-featured villain, pausing with the cup half-way to his lips, and rolling his orbs in a manner of gravity that was ludicrous. "'Ere we are a-doin' of nothink but 'avin' a little sup in private, an' the ca-haptain wants for to break hus all up. I say, now—we ain't a-makin' of no trouble for the rats by hour little private doin's in 'ere, har' we, now?"

"Fools, I say! I have been followed here by a detective—"

"A detective!" burst from all, as they started to their feet.

"And he suspects who I am, there is no doubt."

"My heyes! well, w'ot did you come in 'ere

for? We'll hall be nabbed by the detectives. Why didn't you lead him hoff—"

"Because I want him to come in here," said this master-mind of the rats, in a tone that gave them another start.

The Englishman stooped and gazed at him in amazement.

"In 'ere! In 'ere!" he repeated, in a long-drawn and high-pitched tone.

Evidently he was disposed to consider their leader gone out of his wits utterly.

A murmur went round. The rats were inclined to think with the Englishman: that their leader was giving them completely away to the detective by coming into the haunt, supposing that a detective was really near.

"Listen to me," said the Italian, sharply. "I want the man to enter—but he must not go out again, you comprehend a me, eh?"

"O-h!"

"hI see! hI see, my lads; the captain is right in this 'ere little lay. 'E wants the cop to come in—an' so 'e shall—so 'e shall, my lads; an' 'e mustn't go hout again. hI see!"

At that moment a squeak, like the squeak of a rat was heard in the direction of the loose and rotten stairs that led to the upper portion of the building.

"Danger! He is coming!" hissed the Italian. "Scatter. One remain at the door."

In the lapse of not more than five seconds every one of the rats had vanished from the room with the stealth of the rodent whose name they bore.

Guiseppe went up to the stairs to see whence came the danger which the signal apprised of.

The sentinel of the rats was at the head of the flight.

"Where?" he asked, briefly.

A motion was the answer. The man leveled a finger toward the roof.

Then he pointed toward the front window, where there was a ragged paper curtain.

Through the rents of the curtain Guiseppe looked and saw a sailor making his way slowly toward the end of the bowsprit of the vessel, and soon he would be close enough to the house to take a leap of a few feet and land safely on the roof.

Cautious and natural as had been the movements of Daniels, the wary rat had suspected him by having seen him cast occasional sharp glances toward the house, and by the fact of noticing—himself an old water-hand—that this climbing sailor was really doing nothing on his elevated perch, nothing except to advance steadily and slowly in the direction of the roof, with now and then a pause as if to fumble with some of the splicings on the sprit.

One glance was sufficient for Guiseppe.

As keen as detectives' eyes were his own. He instantly recognized in the sailor the one who had followed him from the saloon on Thames street—and he was aware of this occurrence even before he had traversed the short distance between the saloon and Broadway.

"Let him come," he said, in an undertone, to the rat at his side. "Go to the cellar where the others are. I will meet this fellow. If you hear a pistol-shot come at once, and if he is the survivor of the shot, strike every knife of the gang into his accursed body."

When alone, the Italian, grim and filled with a murderous thought, drew back to the gloomy entry, stepping behind the jamb.

There was no scuttle to the old house; he knew that if the detective entered, it must be through the window at the front—a feat that might be easily accomplished at that busy hour of the day, when people were too much occupied with the affairs of routine transactions to be gazing up at roofs.

A cool as well as practiced villain was Guiseppe Duoro.

Smiling placidly he waited.

And not for long.

Presently there was a noise at the window, the catch of which Guiseppe had even unfastened to facilitate the entrance of the man he had resolved to murder.

The sash was raised and the curtain pushed aside.

The detective, in his sailor garb, leaped lightly inside, and having let down the sash without any noise, paused to listen.

The house was as still as death.

Nothing was there to betray that under that very roof was a greater portion of the night bird band of Baltimore Basin.

Daniels advanced.

As he took the few stealthy steps, he was confronted by the tall form of the disguised Italian, who came around the door jamb with a swing of his great overcoat.

"Ah," he said, saluting blandly, "who is this I have caught in the act of robbing my house?"

"Do you live here?" asked Daniels, seeing that he had a man of nerve to deal with, and not in the least thrown off his guard by the encounter.

"It is my residence. Aha! I have caught you in the act of trying to steal something from me. You sailors are of a very bad class, I fear."

The Italian advanced to within a few feet of the detective. He halted, and from his black

eyes there shot a fiery glance of hate as he added, quickly:

"You have not come to rob. You are here to arrest me—"

"Right you are, old man."

"Instead, you will take that!" and with the words there was a half-smothered explosion.

He had fired a revolver at the detective with the hand that he held in his overcoat pocket and without drawing the weapon.

The detective dodged in time—as if apprised beforehand of the treacherous shot that was coming—and the bullet went wide of its mark.

Then Daniels made a lightning movement forward. His fist darted outward with the force of a sledge hammer.

Fairly between the eyes of the Italian fell the blow.

He was too wary to attempt to grapple with this man a third time, when he knew now the secret of the electric coat of mail.

Down to the floor sunk Guiseppe, insensible under the blow.

And almost simultaneously the detective heard a pattering of light footsteps on the lower stairs.

The rats were coming in obedience to the arranged signal with their leader.

He sprang toward the prone form of the Italian.

In a trice he had stripped from him the great overcoat and hat, and even in that moment of probable peril, he took time to clap a pair of handcuffs on the fellow's wrists.

A moment after he had accomplished the change which gave the Italian the appearance of being the sailor, and himself disguised by the same whiskers that the felon had worn, several forms rushed in at the doorway—

To be met by the form of the detective, whom they took to be Electro Pete.

He stood with one hand elevated, as if to check them; and they obeyed the sign.

Then he waved his hand in a manner that meant for them to depart, not daring to risk the sound of his voice in a command. And here was demonstrated how great was the commanding power of the Italian over the rattish crew; for instantly they slunk out of sight, not now making any attempt to quiet their footfalls.

The instant he was alone, Daniels stepped to the side of the prostrate Italian and improvised a gag of his handkerchief, which he thrust into the villain's mouth. Next, he made admirable use of another pair of handcuffs which he had about him, by claspings them both around the leg of the prisoner and the other bracelets which the latter now wore.

The chain connecting the two iron bands permitted of this circle round the limbs. And thus pinioned, it would be impossible for the Italian to reach his mouth with his handcuffed members to remove the gag.

"Now, my fine fellow, I think I have captured you," Daniels muttered. "But how to get you out of here is another question."

And indeed it was rather a novel condition of affairs.

To carry the prisoner down the stairs and out of the house without being confronted by the desperate wharf rats was impossible. To take him out at the window was equally impracticable.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A SLEUTH THAT HOLDS TO THE TRAIL.

WHILE Mark Daniels stood debating upon what course he should pursue, the footfalls of the receding rats became fainter and fainter, until complete silence reigned.

Then he descended the stairs, with revolver ready for a shot.

Through the lower rooms he went.

In the room where we have seen the Italian enter at first, a trap was to be seen at one side.

This he raised, and lighting a fuse, looked down into the pit-like cellar beneath.

Not a vestige of the recent crew that had inhabited the place in their phantom way.

"This is fortunate in one respect," he muttered, with a long breath. "It looks as if there wasn't anybody left here; and all I have to do is to march my prisoner out to the tune of: 'If you don't go, I'll drag you, that's all!'"

Having satisfied himself that the rats had indeed deserted the old dwelling, he returned in haste to the room in the upper story, where he had left the Italian handcuffed and lying insensible.

And here an astonisher awaited him.

Guiseppe had disappeared.

On the floor at the spot where he had lain was a small paper with some lines on it written in lead pencil.

He grasped up the paper and read this:

"You are a very smart detective. But you have not yet captured Electro Pete. I defy you."

There was nothing in that apartment to suggest a secret way of egress, though his eyes glanced about keenly in search of such a thing.

It seemed impossible that the Italian could have escaped without assistance; and he had surely not descended the stairs.

But the rats were like their namesakes, sly and full of dark ways.

Guiseppe had had assistance while the detective was exploring below. He was gone.

"No use in crying over what cannot now be helped!" he exclaimed, in vexation.

With which scant consolation, he went out from the building boldly at the entrance upon the alley.

No sooner had he gone than a slide in the wall of the room up-stairs was pushed aside and the face of the Englishman who had figured among the rats appeared thrust forward.

"E's gone, me noble Cap. You ca-hn come hout."

"And curse your cowardice! Why did not you shoot him, as I commanded, when we gazed at him through the peep-hole?"

"Now there!" exclaimed the Englishman, with an injured air. "'Ow could hI shoot 'im through a 'ole wot isn't any bigger than a pea? Besi-hdes, I was always awerse to the sheddin' hof 'uman blood, me noble Cap."

"Now then, these 'cursed irons. How I am going to get-a them off, eh?"

"Oh, why, has to that, I am the werry man. Look a' 'ere!" and Billy Yorkshire produced a small and splendid file from the heel of his slouchy boot, which he unscrewed at a few turns.

"It will sever the chain of the cuffs, but the bands it will not cut—they are steel."

"Well, wot's that di-hifference? hIf your 'ands are free, you can put 'em in your pockets. When you are hin a safer spot, why you can saw 'em off altogether, me noble Cap. Come."

Billy went to work on the small chain and it was not long before the links were sufficiently weakened to break them with a stout wrench of the wrists, and the Italian stood erect, gazing at the remaining bracelets with a face filled with rage.

"Now then!" exclaimed Billy, as he restored the file to its secret receptacle of the heel and high counter of his boot.

"Come!" the Italian said.

"hI'm with you. 'Ere we goes."

But the man of Yorkshire was very careful to allow his captain to take the lead down the stairs.

He had a wholesome fear of encountering the detective.

The coast seemed to be entirely clear for the pair of villains.

Before passing through the door leading to the alley, the Italian paused and asked:

"What has become of the rest of the-a band?"

"Gone, me noble Cap—all gone. They 'ave flown to the four co-hrners of the earth. They hare as the rats of the mining-pits—halarmed at the warning hof the hexplosion."

"Let them go then, the cowards. You come with me, Billy Yorkshire."

"Now there! Why, hI'll be a-followin' of you, me noble Cap, to the hends hof the hearth!" vowed Billy, stoutly.

"Sh! Be cautious."

Casting first a glance along the alley, the Italian then stepped forth, followed by the only remaining rat of the well-organized gang that he and Pietro had chieftained as one individual for so long.

Out on the wharves another glance, as if in search of the man from whose clutches he had so recently escaped.

Then the two proceeded toward the ferry.

Purchasing tickets for the Point, they retired to the bare little cabin and stood looking out of its one little window.

But the Italian was saying to his companion

"Billy Yorkshire, we are under the eyes o: that accursed sleuth again."

"Nho!" aspirated Billy, with rolling orbs, though he was careful not to glance around.

"Yes. Did not you mark a popinjay sort of man, with yellow whiskers, who came on board by the other gangway? He is at the bow now, and through the one eye-glass he wears he is watching us."

"Why, hit's only ha 'armless dude, me noble Cap. hAnd if you say so, hI'll go and tweak the hend of 'is nose, I will."

"And if you try it, you will find yourself tossed overboard by Mark Daniels, one of the most athletic detectives of Baltimore, as I have learned."

And he it was, again on the track of Guiseppe Duoro.

He had wisely loitered in the vicinity of the rickety house, in the half-belief that the Italian could not have left the building.

In this new disguise—which he had accomplished in a trice before leaving the narrow alley—his vigil had been rewarded.

"Why, now there! hIf I didn't take 'im for a bloomin' idiot!" the man of Yorkshire whispered. And he asked: "hI'd like to know what we hare a-going to do about it? hIt hain't werry pleasant, you know, to 'ave a detective so werry close all the time."

"Listen-a you to me," hissed the Italian. "We will go the old wharf below the Lazaretto, and from there into the grove beyond. We will act as though we have not the suspicion of he was on our track. You will be the boatman who is to take me where I shall wish to go. If you forget and talk to me as if we

are acquaint, I shall drive my knife to your heart. You will now act at once as if you were afraid of losing me for a customer. We will find a boat at the wharf where the boatman of the rats used to meet Jacobs, the Jew. He will never meet him again, I am afraid."

"hAnd wot 'as 'appened to that werry hac-commodating individual?"

"Jugged!" was the terse response.

"hAnd that is the ways of the world," commented Billy, with the air of a man who considers the consequence fully merited. "hIf you do not lead a virtuous life, you hare bound to come to grief."

"Business!" the Italian hissed.

Thereupon, Billy, who was no mean actor, began to behave as if he was afraid of losing a customer.

He apparently repeated, and in a loud tone, the assertion that he was the best boatman in the harbor; could show his country friend more sights for his money than any other oar-puller on the Basin.

"hAnd," he vowed, loud enough for his words to reach every passenger on the ferry-boat, "whenever there's a party of the werry best o' the bloods wot goes down with the councilmen for to break champagne, while the reporters is a-busy a-makin' hup the reports for the committee wot never sees wot they goes to see, 'ere you'll see me, with people like Johnny Garret or 'is beautiful boy Bobby, a sailin' hin my boat an' a-keepin' of their sober heyas about them. Why, there! hit's a 'onor for to sail in my boat, me noble—"

In another breath he would have said: "Me noble Cap."

But the terrible glance that came from the Italian's eyes warned him that he might go a step too far with his voluble self-recommendation.

At the Point they proceeded to that wharf which Daniels had visited on a previous occasion when trailing the Jew.

There were several boats moored to the spiles, and into one of these the spotted pair got and rowed slowly away.

Guiseppe's orbs shone with a devilish light as he saw the disguised detective hail one of those small steam launches that ply almost incessantly and for hire up and down the harbor.

"He follows!" the villain muttered. "Good! We shall lure him this time surely to his death. He does not suspect that we are aware of his identity. Your hours are numbered, Mark Daniels!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANOTHER CLICK OF THE HANDCUFFS.

THAT portion of the Baltimore harbor which extends to the eastward and beyond the light-house is backed by a stretch of comparatively uninhabited country from the termination of the Canton section.

At intervals there are pleasant groves, some of which have been utilized for many years by enterprising individuals as summer resorts of transient accommodation and refreshment.

Landing below what has been long known as the old spider wharf, the Italian was led briskly by his supposed boatman toward one of these unused and copse-like spots, Billy Yorkshire the while making prominent gesticulations as if pointing out in that barren locality some indication of ancient legend.

The detective was following.

But the two saw that their trailer had changed his disguise.

It was a veritable tramp, to all appearances, who now followed them from the spider wharf; though the Italian had observed that he must have been landed around the bend of the little creek that makes in below the Lazaretto.

"He comes," repeated the wily Guiseppe. "My revenge for the trouble he is causing me is drawing nigh. Ha!—you Yorkshire Billy, you-a hear me?"

"Me noble Cap, where hare me ears? Hof course I hears you."

"Be careful when we have entered the trees. There we will ambush him and strike out his miserable life."

"To be sure we will—hand werry glad will 'e when 'e is dead. hI'm with you."

Amid the trees they vanished presently.

It looked very much as if Daniels was deceived.

On he came, in his tramp's garb, and occasionally lurching from side to side like a man under the influence of liquor.

A jolly tramp he seemed, for as he thumped his boots on the mingled dust and sod, he sung:

"Oh, if I was a brewer's mule
Oh, if I was a brewer's mule,
I'd ram my mouth in a beery sound,
I'd drink till my head swam round and round
And a jolly old mule I'd be!"

On he came, and into the shadows of the trees.

The spot appeared to be entirely deserted.

Suddenly a figure confronted him.

Billy Yorkshire.

"hI say, me noble brother, where hare you bound—hey?"

Billy's attire was not far from the actually

ragged. It seemed to have been a rule with him, withal his share from the robberies of his comrades in crime, to maintain an appearance of veriest poverty, though at that very moment he carried in his pocket hundreds of dollars left from his share of the money which the Jew had put up for division among the rats as an advance on the diamonds stolen from the drummer.

Supposing that the detective had been a tramp in reality, the voluble Billy might have easily passed himself off for a brother of that mysterious army.

"Bound to fresh fields and pastures new, my welcome pard," replied Daniels, in a well-assumed consonance with the character he was assuming.

"Now look a-ther! Why, *hi've* just started for to get hout o' this werry in'ospitable town myself; hand, if you says so, we'll go together."

"Of course—(hic!) We'll go together. Take a drink, my brother, and then we'll exchange the mystic sign of our noble brotherhood. You're one, I see, by the ragged tail of that patched coat you wear."

He produced a bottle labeled whisky.

Billy clasped his hands and made a grimace that was truly lugubrious.

"Behold!" he exclaimed. "'Ere I've been a-starvin' for two 'ole days, when there comes along a angel w'ot carries the spirits to give a man the wings o' 'appiness. Just see 'ow my 'ands is a-tremblin'."

He extended his hands, to show that they trembled like the members of one who has been on a terrible spree and who stood now in need of something to strengthen him before he could walk a step further.

It was an unfortunate action for Billy Yorkshire.

Exactly how it happened, he never afterward could explain—but suddenly there was a snap, and almost before he could straighten the gaze which he was assuming upward with rolling eyes, he realized that a pair of handcuffs had been clapped and fastened on his wrists.

Simultaneously a hand gripped his collar and a knee struck into the small of his back. He was jerked roughly over flat on the ground with such force that it nearly knocked the breath out of him.

Then the foot of the detective was planted on his breast, and leveling a revolver toward a little clump of undergrowth at one side, Daniels cried:

"Come out, Guiseppe, or you are a goner. I can see your head plainly. I have but to pull this trigger of my self-cocking revolver, and you are a dead man!"

Daniels had really not seen the Italian, but his keen eyes had noticed a slight commotion in the bushes at the moment when he so adroitly overturned the Englishman.

And by one of those chances which sometimes favor the sleuth-hounds of the law, his weapon was then actually leveled at the head of the concealed Italian.

This Guiseppe saw, though the other knew it not.

He believed himself in imminent danger of being shot instantly, as it was now apparent to him that the shrewd detective had played a game worth two of his own.

Gnashing his white teeth in rage, he stepped forth.

"What you will-a have eh?"

"Unconditional surrender," replied Daniels, coolly.

"So shall it be. I will surrender to you—"

"Take your hands out of your pockets. You tried that trick on me once before. Just cast your eye down the length of this little tube—" nodding sideways at the revolver—"and you will see that no matter how quick you may fire at me, I will still have time to return the shot, and it will reach your brain, I promise you."

The next action of the Italian nearly cost him his life.

He drew a revolver from the overcoat pocket and dashed it down on the ground with an oath.

Daniels's finger pressed the trigger of his weapon for the fatal shot at sight of the weapon in the other's hand, but fortunately not hard enough to send the bullet on its course of death.

"Take-a me!" cried the Italian, with gritting teeth. "You will have your trouble for your pains. Mind-a you, I shall never live to be hung—else I would not yield to you now."

"That's all right. Now then, right about march. Head toward the harbor, my obliging friend. And you," giving Billy Yorkshire a kick, "get up here and walk as stiff as a poker right behind your arch rat, do you hear?"

Up rose Billy, with bended limbs.

"Why, hof course!" he said, in a long-drawn way. "Hanything to oblige you, me noble cop o' the law. *hi'm* with you to the end o' the world, me werry admired friend."

A singular procession it was that presently approached the steam launch which Daniels had in waiting at the bend by the little creek.

For the sleuth had "tumbled" to the game of the Italian the instant he saw him making toward the deserted portion of country below Canton.

A shrill whistle blew from the roof of the

launch, as it headed up-stream toward Light street.

Upon the launch, Daniels placed the handcuffs on his prisoner, with the remark—as he unlocked those he had placed there so shortly before:

"Rather a lucky thing, my friend Guiseppe, that I always carry a plentiful supply of these little ornaments. I think we have you pretty fine on this trip, haven't we?"

The Italian showed that he was the polished villain, even in the disguising garb he wore that looked so awkward.

He rubbed his braceleted hands together and smiled complacently as he replied:

"You are the detective who is so very smart—I am the man you think is the Electro Pete, eh?"

"Oh, no, I don't take you for anything other than what you are. Simply Guiseppe Duoro, the man who murdered Electro Pete! It is for that murder, as well as the burglary of the diamonds, that you will have to answer, my gay bird."

"Why, there, just listen to the compliments he's a-payin' of you, by callin' you *ha* bird," inserted Billy Yorkshire, who seemed not in the least disturbed by the effect of the cold bracelets on his own wrists.

"Look-a you, detective."

"Well?"

"What terms you will make with me for the diamonds, the jewelry which has been lost?"

"Not any, I must say."

"There is that to the value of many thousand dollars."

"I suppose so. Do you know where they are?"

"Yes. I and only one other can tell where to find them. You will make some terms with me, or not the first bauble shall ever be returned. Come, you have some interest in the return of these things; it will not be the first time a detective has had to make terms with the burglar, eh, to get back the stolen property."

"But you've got things a little wrong," said Daniels.

"Why you say that?"

"The diamonds have been already recovered, and all the jewelry, with perhaps the exception of about a thousand dollars' worth, is in our hands—"

"That is a lie!"

"Oh, no, it isn't, as you will find."

The cool assertion of the detective impressed the villain with his earnestness.

And notwithstanding he could hardly believe that the Jew had given up or had wrested from him the recent treasure, he became moody during the rest of the trip of the little steam-launch back to the city.

With his two prisoners under a sharp eye, Daniels proceeded to the Agency.

CHAPTER XXIX.

RESTORATION OF THE DIAMONDS.

AT the Agency of West & Co., Daniels found his senior with the girl, Anice.

The disguise was immediately stripped from the Italian, and the moment his eyes rested on Anice, he gnashed:

"Aha! you too are here. Well, I think I shall not be the only one who goes to the prison. You are to answer for the murder of your father, Pedro Catazky—"

"Oh, no, she isn't," said West, who seemed to take the capture of the villain as a matter of course and evinced no surprise when Daniels marched him in. "You forget the confession of the man you recently murdered, Electro Pete. It is you who shall answer for complicity in that murder, my fine fellow, by furnishing the electric apparatus which killed Pedro Catazky. Ah! here comes some one—"

The clerk opened the door of the rear office and ushered in the same figure in black we have seen visit the Agency before: Oriole St. Dyer.

West had sent for her to tell her that they were now so close on the heels of the villains in the drama, that she need have no further fear of them, and had better return to her lover, Robert Rathwaite, whose anxiety about her was really plunging him into a sickly melancholy.

The moment she saw Guiseppe standing there she halted and exclaimed, pointing at him:

"There is the man who entered my room and changed himself into a column of fire."

"You are sure of this?"

"I could swear it."

"Well, there is no doubt that you are right. But let me show you, miss, how easily a person can be mistaken when they are ready to swear to a thing."

He gave her a brief history of the little plot into which she had been inveigled to her danger, the principal feature of which was the remarkable resemblance of the two Italians, Pietro Idello and Guiseppe Duoro.

Then he said, turning to Anice, who had remained in the background:

"Come forward, miss, if you please."

She obeyed.

Her gaze thus directed upon the other, Oriole stood for a moment with flashing eyes, as if she would have poured forth a torrent of reproaches upon the one to whom she owed all her trouble of the past few years.

But her more gentle nature rose uppermost, and she simply said:

"How could you do what you have done? How could you take advantage of my desire to benefit a fellow creature, to bring upon me the awful peril in which I have lived since that fateful night when we met in the street in Chicago."

Anice ran forward and grasped her counterpart by both hands.

Into her beautiful eyes there rose a flood of tears, and her musical voice was broken by alternate sobbing as she cried:

"Forgive me!—oh, forgive. I was a wild, desperate and hunted thing; I had nowhere to turn to throw off those who were in pursuit of me to encompass my ruin, my death! By night and by day, I was confronted by the horror of the trailer who had sworn to have my life, and the trailer who would have dragged me back to grasp the wealth of my murdered father or have given me over to the law that was searching for me. I knew not what I was doing—only that it was a step to save my life. I did not mean that you should suffer as you have—as I have been told you did through the years afterward. I found a home with a Jew who agreed to act the part of my father in return for a magnificent diamond ring which tempted him. And alas, I but went from one danger to another; for this Jew was connected with a vile gang, and you may judge of my horror when I was confronted, here in Baltimore, with my husband, Pietro Idello, who was also a member of the gang. He saw and knew me at once, though I will say for the Jew that he denied my identity as other than his daughter for a long while. It was useless; and when he learned from Pietro that an immense fortune could be possessed by putting me forward and casting the suspicion of my father's murder on Guiseppe—upon whom a slight suspicion already rested—he turned against me and sought to aid Pietro in forcing me back to Italy. Ah! you can never understand what I have passed through. I was a prisoner in the house of the Jew; his eyes were ever on my movements, though he still deceived others with the story that I was his daughter. I have had no chance to seek you who were my benefactress on that night long ago; indeed, I thought not of your being endangered, now that Pietro had found me again. You will forgive me? Say that you will forgive me!" and she clung to Oriole tightly as the tears streamed down her lovely face.

"I forgive, and I will forget," replied Oriole, tenderly.

At this point, Daniels asked:

"How did you come into possession of that tiara with a setting of a single diamond?"

"It was brought to the Jew by a man named Arnold. I was in the shop at the time, and Jacobs placed it on my head to see the effect. A mere trifle, compared to its actual worth, was it that he gave the young man."

"Are you still at the boarding-house the address of which you gave me when last here?"

"Yes."

"Then I would suggest that you take this much abused young lady there with you until we are entirely through with this business. I am going to see Mr. Rathwaite. What shall I say to him?"

"Tell him where I am, and say that I am waiting to see him."

"I will do so."

A close cab, in which Oriole had come to the Agency, was at the door. Into this the two girls stepped, and were driven away.

West proceeded to the station with the two prisoners, aided by an assistant.

Mark Daniels sought the hotel, and ascended to the room of the drummer, Dimble.

This personage he found in a rather prostrated condition.

Instantly upon seeing that it was the detective who entered, he cried, anxiously:

"Any news? Any news of the diamonds?"

"Be cool, sir—"

"Tell me," Dimble broke in, raising to his elbow in the bed to which he had retired in his weakness of worryment.

"Well, yes, a little."

"What is it?"

"Now don't 'go off.' Good news has been known to kill, you know."

The drummer leaped from the couch and ran forward.

There was something in the detective's glance and tone that roused a great hope in his heart.

"You have found them!" he ejaculated, grasping the other by the arm.

"Yes, we have found your lost treasure. But have you done meantime what I advised?"

"Yes, yes!"

Dimble ran to the bureau.

Back he came with a letter.

"I telegraphed them as you requested. Here are the descriptions. More, they want to know what the deuce it means—my writing to them

for descriptions of the diamonds and jewelry which I am supposed to have under my eyes. They smell a rat. But there is no danger for me now, is there? I can read it in your look. You have found everything?"

"Nearly everything. So make your mind easy."

As Daniels took the letter from Dimble's hands, the latter actually sunk to his knees and clapped both hands over his eyes, as if overcome by the rare good news.

And no wonder, poor fellow! Though one of the oldest drummers and trusted of the extensive jewelry establishment which he was representing, he had realized the peril and disgrace which must ensue upon so startling a loss—a loss that few houses would tolerate under the sole explanation of mystery which marked the disappearance of his trust.

The letter was written in answer to a telegram sent by Dimble to his employers, at the suggestion of Daniels; and the suggestion was intended to make positive that the diamonds were really in the possession of the drummer in the way he had represented.

"Mr. Dimble."

The drummer looked up.

Another and a glad cry burst from his lips, as he beheld extended toward him, in the detective's hand, the belt containing the numerous diamonds.

With trembling fingers he took it.

"The jewelry," Daniels said, "is at present at the northeastern station. It will probably be a day or two before you can procure it. And even then, you must not leave the city, as we wish to use the articles in evidence against the culprits."

"Anything! Anything you command!" declared the grateful Dimble. "Oh, sir, you know that I am but a poor drummer who has only his salary to support him, and in the city of St. Louis a dear little family of wife and daughter who would have hung their heads in disgrace forever if you had not come forward to help me out of this terrible dilemma. I am sure you have not accomplished what you have without trouble—perhaps danger. I will devote my life to paying you for what you have done, only retaining enough from what I earn to keep my dear ones from actual want. But my heart—my heart, sir, will never realize that I have sufficiently repaid you," and as if unable to say more, the grateful Dimble sobbed like a child.

"That's all right. And I don't think it will be necessary for you to take anything out of your salary to pay me. Just come right out in full to your employers now; state the whole case to them, and refer them to us for a verification of the remarkable manner in which you were robbed. You may tell them, too, that we have, on short acquaintance, as much confidence in you as they have learned to place through a knowledge of years."

Thus Mark Daniels left his patron.

In the office of the hotel he met the proprietor, and the news he had to communicate caused that individual's face to fairly beam.

"Wait a moment, Mr. Daniels."

And presently into the detective's hand there was dropped a small, slim paper with very much the appearance of a check.

"You may throw open the room recently occupied by Miss St. Dyer," Daniels said, as he bowed and turned to depart.

But he paused and added:

"Will you please send this up to Mr. Rathwaite's room, if he is in?" at the same time scribbling a few words on a card.

"Certainly."

The young man in room No. — responded rather absently to the knock of the waiter on his door.

But when he had read the message that was on the card, he seemed imbued with another life—starting for his coat and hat and almost running forth from the hotel to hail a cab.

Daniels had merely written:

"Miss St. Dyer is waiting to see you at No. —, North Calvert street. DANIELS."

CHAPTER XXX.

CONCLUSION.

STRAIGHTWAY from the hotel, Daniels returned to the Agency.

A slight surprise awaited him there in the person of a man who smelled decidedly of chemicals.

The clerk said:

"Here is Mr. Daniels, sir. You can communicate your business to him."

"You wish to see the firm?"

"A-h, yes. A word in private. You pay for information, do you not?"

"Always, if it is worth having."

"Exactly. Well, I have something to say and to show you."

"Step this way."

Daniels led the way to the rear room.

"My name is Blobbles. I am a photographer. I am on the travel. I carry an amateur outfit with me. I make my living photographing country residences and the like. About how

much would you give for something that would put you on one of the greatest mysteries that have ever been perpetrated at a hotel—that is—" Blobbles checked himself with an affected cough. He seemed to think that he was talking too fast.

"Go ahead, my dear sir. If you have a very great mystery, let me hear it. If we can use it to advantage in any way, it will be paid for."

Blobbles, on this second assurance, drew a picture from his breast pocket.

Daniels took it and looked at it, for it was handed over in silence.

A dark, and at first almost undiscernible photo it was.

But on a close scrutiny, it showed the keen-eyed detective a representation of a man swinging from a window by a rope, in the darkness of night and about to alight on the sill of another window below.

"It is the half-second process—dry plate," said Blobbles, effusively. "I am living at the Mansion House. My room fronts on the center court. I have observed the actual of which that picture is a reproduction. I have seen it several times. The second time—always on the lookout for something novel, you know, I had my camera ready set upon the spot. There is the result. It has taken several days to bring out the print; but I am quite sure that there is something going on at the Mansion House that is worthy the investigation of the detectives. I shall ask no pay until the investigation reveals something."

"Thank you," said Daniels, as he handed back the picture. "And as you have been at considerable trouble in getting the print into a recognizable shape, here—here—here are a couple of dollars for you, Mr. Blobbles."

He handed the zealous photographer the amount as he spoke.

The face of the photographer fell.

He had an inflated idea of the liberality of the detective agencies in their payments for information, and he believed that he had made a photograph of something that would open up a remarkable case of hotel robbery.

Daniels had recognized in the scene a picture of the manner in which Guiseppe Duoro had accomplished his entrance into the room of Oriole St. Dyer.

While Blobbles really seemed deserving of more reward for his efforts in what he had done, the detective was, in a business way dealing with stale news, hence his small contribution to the genius of Blobbles.

"Isn't it worth more than that?"

"Hardly. For, my dear Blobbles, we have investigated the matter at which this picture hints long ago; the very person who performed this acrobatic feat which your print reveals is now in jail. A word: whenever you have anything like this on hand, for which you expect a reward, go to the Agencies first. If your talent as a photographer can be utilized—then you may do something better. Good-day."

With which dismissal, Blobbles went out of the office in a very thoughtful mood.

"Hang it!" he muttered, "while I have been perfecting from my negative, these shrewd detectives have sifted the whole thing. I shall remember his advice. If ever I have another like opportunity, I shall do as he says."

It was dusk of the evening by this time.

And just as Mark Daniels was starting toward Guy's for a little refreshment, there was an alarm of fire.

Simultaneously, as he was on the bottom step of the office, West appeared.

"Come," said the senior, hurriedly. "Don't you recognize that number?"

"Didn't pay any attention. Where is it?"

"Thames and Broadway. Nine out of ten it is at the junk-shop. Come."

Catching a cab at Battle Monument, they were whirled away to the foot of Broadway.

And West's surmise had been correct.

It was the frame-built, shed-like premises of the Jew that was ablaze.

Before them were the prompt engines; the hose carriages were spinning out their hose from near plugs, and a bedlam of sounds filled the air.

Every one saw that it would be impossible to save the dwelling at the rear.

But no one saw what did these two detectives who had had the place so long under surveillance.

The cordon of shadows that West had placed there were at front and rear.

The man they met, as they hurried up the alley at the rear, said, recognizing his chief:

"The house is full of them."

"Of who?"

"Fellows that are now acting like rats as they scamper about while the building burns, and not a policeman has entered, never thinking of this rear way, I guess."

"Come," said West.

And followed by Daniels and the subordinate, they leaped the high fence and made toward the side door.

Within the dwelling there seemed to reign a vortex of fire.

Out from the windows rolled black smoke; behind the smoke a background of flame, that

gave a lurid outline to many forms darting hither and thither.

The two detectives knew that these must be the remainder of the wharf rat band. They had fled from the rickety shanty by the ferry-wharf to the house they supposed must contain an abundance of plunder, and in the dusk of the day with a raging fire they hoped to obtain a profit by vandal ransacking.

Nimble as rats were they.

To and fro, amid smoke and fire they ran—some with bags, some with valises.

The night-bird band of Locust Point was broken up, and before they departed for fresh fields they had resolved upon a wholesale plundering of Jacobs's "fence," under cover of the excitement of the fire and while the street was filled with the murmur and noise of the alarm from box No. 156.

156!—156!—156! rung the bells, above all of which could be heard the great tongue of Big Sam from the City Hall.

Into the dwelling sprung West.

Behind him Daniels, followed by the shadow subordinate.

Presently revolvers snapped and cracked.

Howls came from the midst of that scene of flame and smoke.

"Surrender, you scoundrels! Wharf rats of Locust Point, I'm after you!"

It happened that the detectives had cornered the majority of the rats in one room—the shop of the Jew.

Daniels immediately dashed to the front to bar egress; West leaped before the way to the upper rooms; the subordinate held the door by which they had entered.

Oaths, yells and pistol-shots filled the air.

But down went bags and valises.

"March! Keep in line of this revolver!" cried West, sternly, "or down you go, every mother's son of you. No fooling; and be quick, for the fire will engulf you all in another minute. Forward!"

Under the revolvers of the three, the remnant of the night-bird band sullenly marched from the burning building.

On the outside at the rear, by this time, were several policemen from the Eastern Station, among whom was famous Johnny Carr. With the reinforcement, West had no difficulty in conveying the roguish file to the station.

The drama which opened with a remarkable mystery was now really at its climax.

Before the undertaker could arrive to look after the body of the arch-villain, Pietro Idello, in accordance with the orders of West, the fire occurred.

A mass of charred bones that were overturned after the fire were reasonably supposed to be those of the Italian.

Baltimore seldom has such sensations as that which arose out of the doings of the Night Bird Band of the Basin, and but for the busy eyes of the ubiquitous reporter, it is probable that this narrative had never been written.

Many harbor robberies have been traced to the captured crew which West brought in, and at present there are some awaiting the result of the wounds of the captain of the Norwegian barque, which was pirated by the band.

Even while the fire raged on Thames street, Dimble the drummer was on his way to New York, to have a conversation with his employers in regard to the robbery. He was an honest fellow and determined to see the detectives who had saved him from so much trouble duly rewarded. He had always thought the profession a purely mercenary one, without anything like the sentiment of desire to simply do what was right, such as he had experienced in the Monumental City, and the author may safely assert that the firm of West & Daniels received a communication from the New York jewelers that contained something more than the mere thanks of the firm.

Dimble did not lose his situation.

The reunion of the lovers, Robert Rathwaite and Oriole St. Dyer was a picture that the pen has often described when a devoted couple have been separated by strange circumstances, and on this late page it is useless to detain the reader with an effusion of sentiment.

Suffice it that they were very, very happy in the long explanation which followed, and Mayor Whyte himself, ere he yielded up his office to Mr. Latrobe, the newly elected, made fast the knot between the young Chicago grain merchant and the beautiful girl.

Rathwaite, too, remembered the Agency in a pleasant letter that contained an inclosure and an invitation to visit him and his wife at their home in Chicago, whither they departed at once, accompanied by Anice Idello, from whose unfortunate past had sprung so much to create the narrative herein given.

The Jew, Jacobs, is docketed for trial now in Baltimore, as a receiver of stolen goods.

And a jury will shortly decide whether Guiseppe Duoro shall pay the penalty of the murder of the man known as Electro Pete in the Thames street den of the Wharf Rats of Locust Point.

THE END.

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